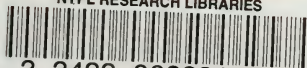


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Rowland

ON THE
COMMON MAXIMS OF INFIDELITY.

BY

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HENRY A. ROWLAND.

"They have made them crooked paths; whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace."—ISAIAH, lix, 8

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
PREFATORY REMARKS,	5
INTRODUCTORY.—Infidelity explained—Often exhibits itself under disguise—Assumes the form of maxims—The object of this work stated,	9
CHAPTER I.	
Concerning the infidel maxim, that men are not responsible for their belief, and that it is no matter what a man believes if sincere in his belief,	12
CHAPTER II.	
Concerning the infidel maxim, that the light of nature is a sufficient guide in matters of religion,	29
CHAPTER III.	
Concerning the infidel maxim, that if we act according to our conscience, we cannot err,	59
CHAPTER IV.	
Concerning the skeptical maxim, that, if the life be right, it is no matter what one thinks or believes about religion,	73
CHAPTER V.	
Concerning the skeptical maxim, that religion is the creature of education,	100

CHAPTER VI.

Concerning the infidel maxim, that there are so many religions and religious opinions in the world, that we cannot decide on their respective claims,	118
---	-----

CHAPTER VII.

Concerning the skeptical maxim, that religion is unworthy of credit, because its credibility depends on human testimony ; and because, if it had come from God, it would have been published in a universal language,	141
---	-----

CHAPTER VIII.

Concerning the infidel maxim, that if God desire the happiness of man and cannot effect it, where are his wisdom and his power ; if he can and will not, where is his goodness ?	170
--	-----

CHAPTER IX.

Concerning the skeptical maxim, that religion is a gross delusion,	192
--	-----

CHAPTER X.

Concerning the source or origin of infidelity,	212
--	-----

CHAPTER XI.

The moral tendencies of infidelity,	232
---	-----

CHAPTER XII.

The influence of infidelity on social and domestic happiness,	249
---	-----

CHAPTER XIII.

The influence of infidelity on the future and eternal welfare of men,	271
---	-----

CHAPTER XIV.

Concerning the truth,	289
---------------------------------	-----

PREFATORY REMARKS.

THIS work was prepared for publication at the solicitation of some whose judgment the Christian public regard with favor. The design and execution are original, there being no work, that I know of, where the points of infidelity which are in common circulation as maxims, are thus distinctly treated of. Dr. Nelson's Cause and Cure of Infidelity is a work of peculiar excellence and utility ; but it does not show with the distinctness which is desirable what infidelity is as a system, or in what way many of its main arguments are to be met. It seemed to me that something more might be said without treading on ground which he has admirably occupied, and said in a way to strengthen his positions, and in defence of the truth.

The points discussed in this work are the leading articles of infidel faith. These hav-

ing assumed the form of maxims, which are in common circulation, are not, in all cases, known as infidelity. Few who are accustomed to take the ground, for example, that "it is no matter what a man believes if sincere in his belief," know that this is a favorite position of infidelity. It seemed desirable, therefore, to take up these common maxims as we find them, show what they are, by apt quotations from infidel writings, and then analyze and refute them; and to do it systematically, so that a parent may refer his child to a discussion of any one point, or a young man may turn at once to either of the subjects which are set forth. In this way, it was thought, the work might prove useful.

How I have succeeded in the execution of my plan, the public must judge. If the work shall conduce, in any degree, to advance the cause of truth, I shall be amply repaid for my labor. If it shall, in the judgment of the public, deserve a place only among the chaff with which the crop of religious literature abounds, it will find itself in company with numerous works of men esteemed wiser than myself.

Having no character as an author to sustain,

I cheerfully bid my little work good-speed, less solicitous how it may affect my reputation, than whether it will do good, and earnestly desirous that it may be the means of rescuing some who are inclined to skepticism from the path of the fell destroyer.

HENRY A. ROWLAND

HONESDALE, Pa., December 18, 1849.

ON THE COMMON MAXIMS OF INFIDELITY.

INTRODUCTORY.

INFIDELITY EXPLAINED—OFTEN EXHIBITS ITSELF UNDER
DISGUISE—ASSUMES THE FORM OF MAXIMS—THE OB-
JECT OF THIS WORK STATED.

THERE was nothing which gave such annoyance to Thomas Paine as to be called an infidel, and to have his system of religious opinions termed infidelity. He wished to have it thought that he was a religious man, and a friend to virtue, even while laboring, with untiring zeal, to tear away the foundations both of morality and religion.

An infidel is not necessarily one who denies the existence of God and the obligations of moral virtue, but is one who disbelieves the truth and inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, and the divine origin of Christianity. An atheist is an infidel, but an infidel may not be an atheist; for he may believe in the existence of God, and in the practice of

moral virtue, while, at the same time, he denies the divine origin of the Christian religion, and is properly termed an infidel.

Infidelity presents itself to view under a great variety of forms, and in the shades of its opinions assumes a boundless diversity of appearances. Few persons, unless they have investigated the subject, are aware of the extent to which these opinions are disseminated, and of the influence which they exert. Accustomed to regard the infidel as a diabolical kind of person, who represents in himself opinions the most monstrous, and whose heart is the cage of every unclean and blasphemous sentiment, men are not prepared to distrust their neighbor who, though somewhat strange in his religious notions, is a well-meaning and honest man, and they are not, perhaps, aware that these notions of his are infidelity in disguise. This individual would himself be shocked if called an infidel. A good member of society, and an occasional attendant on the ministrations of the Gospel, he may not himself be aware of his own true character. But amid his acknowledged excellencies as a man, he secretly indulges a disbelief of the Christian religion. Accustomed to think against it, it is natural that he should give expression to his thoughts. The poisonous moral sentiments which he thus inculcates are more pernicious in their influences than are the bold attacks of an open and avowed enemy, because they proceed from an unsuspected

source. He who brawls at taverns, and whose mouth is ever filled with coarse and blasphemous thrusts at the Christian religion, exerts but little influence compared with him who treads with a noiseless step on the sacred symbols of Christianity, and whose urbane manners and acknowledged integrity give weight to his expressed opinions. Of the two, this parlor infidelity is by far the most dangerous. That of the tavern and of the haunts of vice reaches none but those who have already become infected with corrupt moral sentiments ; but this finds its way into the hearts of the unsuspecting and the young, and ere they are aware of the danger, works its deadly mischief.

Those who are observant of the ways of men must have noticed that there is in common circulation a class of religious opinions which may be termed infidel maxims, and whose tendency is to pervert from the faith of Christ those who receive them as true. These constitute the religious creed of many who live amid the institutions of the Gospel, and are the real ground of that neglect with which they treat sacred things. To develop these opinions and point out their proper antidote, and especially to guard the young against their pernicious influence, I purpose to examine a few of those maxims which are ever in the mouths of skeptical men, and which constitute their strongest arguments against the religion of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER I.

CONCERNING THE INFIDEL MAXIM, THAT MEN ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR BELIEF, AND THAT IT IS NO MATTER WHAT A MAN BELIEVES IF SINCERE IN HIS BELIEF.

ONE of the most common of those infidel maxims which find their way into the high and low places of the world is, that men are not responsible for their belief; or, as expressed in another form, that it is no matter what a man believes if sincere in his belief. Lord Brougham, in his introductory discourse when installed as the Lord Rector of the University of Glasgow, seems to give currency to this maxim when he says, "As men will no longer suffer themselves to be blindfolded in ignorance, so they will no more yield to the vile principle of judging and treating their fellow-creatures, not according to the intrinsic merit of their actions, but according to the incidental and involuntary coincidence of their opinions. The great truth is finally gone forth to all the ends of the earth, that man shall no more render account to man for his belief, over which he has himself no control. Henceforward, nothing shall prevail upon us to blame any one for

that which he can no more change than he can the hue of his skin or the height of his stature."

Rousseau, in his treatise on Education, comments on the sentiment, "Believe in God and thou shalt be saved." "This dogma misunderstood," he says, "is the principle of sanguinary persecution and the cause of all those futile instructions which have given a mortal blow to human reason, by accustoming it to be satisfied with words. To impose an obligation of believing supposes a possibility of it. But though a child should profess the Christian religion, what can he believe? He can believe only what he conceives, and he conceives so little of what is said to him, that if you tell him exactly the contrary he adopts the latter opinion as readily as he did the former. The faith of children, and indeed of many grown persons, is merely an affair of geography."

This opinion is based on the assumption that our belief is the creature of circumstances which are above our control, and that we are so constituted, or are placed in such a moral position by causes which we cannot govern, as necessarily to believe that which we receive as true. In examining the ground of this assumption, we may proceed from facts of acknowledged verity to gain a knowledge of the principles which these facts involve, and of the relations of our belief to the elements which give it birth.

Belief is the assent of the mind given to that

which is affirmed as true. This assent does not depend upon the will, but is involuntary so far as to the fact that it is the effect of evidence. We cannot help believing that three and two are five so soon as we perceive the power of numbers and understand the principle of their combination. When a geometrical truth is demonstrated, it receives our assent not because we choose to give it, but because we have no power to withhold it. Moral evidence does as certainly control the belief, though it is of a different kind, and admits of a wider range in its application. It is the law of our nature to receive as true that which is established by suitable evidence; and it involves no more responsibility to believe, when such evidence is presented, than it does to see, when the objects of vision lie before us. Responsibility for our belief does not hinge on this connection between belief and evidence, but it arises from other facts which have an essential bearing on this subject, and the consideration of which is necessary to a complete view of it.

We cannot by an act of the will change the character of our belief so as to perceive that three and two are ten, when the evidence clearly shows that they are but five; nor is it in respect to this point that we have any responsibility. The mind acts in view of evidence, according to the law of its intellectual nature, as the eye, in view of the objects of vision, acts according to the law of our

physical nature ; and it does not depend on our volition whether we believe in the one instance, or see in the other. As we may place ourselves in circumstances where we shall see what we ought not, and be led astray by the temptation addressed to us through our vision, so we may, by our own act, place ourselves in circumstances where our belief shall be moulded according to the prevailing desires of our heart, because the evidence controlling this belief, as presented to the mind, will be such as will naturally arise from the course which we pursue.

Our belief may be involuntary so far as it is the result of evidence, and yet voluntary as it respects the character of the evidence in view of which it is formed. We may be unable to change it from the character it assumes, as the natural result of evidence presented to the mind, and yet we may control it through the direction given to the mind in searching out and receiving the evidence in view of which belief is produced. One may be unable to help believing that the sun has a diurnal revolution around the earth, while ignorant of the evidence in the case ; but his is a voluntary ignorance, and so also is his erroneous belief voluntary, for he might easily become acquainted with such evidence as would instantly rectify his error. His belief is involuntary so far as it springs from the evidence before him ; but it is in his power to change it, because he can control the amount and character

of the evidence submitted to the mind on which it depends. So also may one be unable, while ignorant of the evidences of his divine character, to believe in Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world ; but he may be able to gather up such evidences of it as to command his full assent. To set this subject in a clear light, it will be necessary to inquire more at length into the nature of that control which the mind has over its own operations, and to show how our belief results as to its character from our own responsible agency.

I. It is an elementary truth which admits of no reasonable denial, that WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR CONDUCT. We are as conscious of this responsibility as we are of our existence. We are sensible of pleasurable emotions when we do a good action, and of painful ones when we do wrong. These we could not feel if we were not responsible for our actions. It is on this admitted principle that a parent gives law to his children ; that men, associated together in society, frame laws for their mutual protection, and that God governs the subjects of his mighty empire. These laws, with their several penalties, show what the common sentiments of men are relative to their individual responsibility. The fact of this responsibility is as undeniable as is the fact of our moral nature. It is distinctly affirmed by our own consciousness, is admitted to be true in respect to the common affairs of life, and is never questioned excepting in respect

to cases where there is an obvious defect of natural reason, as in that of an idiot or a lunatic.

The ground of this responsibility is discoverable in the intellectual and moral powers with which man is endowed, and the capacity which is imparted to him to distinguish right from wrong, and to refuse the evil and to choose the good. These moral endowments are the basis of his moral obligations. Gifted with reason, and competent through the enjoyment of his natural gifts to mark out and pursue his own path in life, he is morally bound to do what is right, and to avoid what is wrong. Hence arises his obligation to know and to love God. Were he not rationally endowed, and able to perform this duty, the obligation to it would not rest on him. Were he not a free agent, and endowed with those constitutional and moral powers which enable him to act in the freedom of his own will, he could not be thus responsible. Nor could he be the proper subject of law, either human or divine. But it is universally admitted that men are the proper subjects of moral government, because they are rationally endowed and are free agents; they are, therefore, responsible for their conduct, and both the responsibility itself, and the moral endowments which originate it, are inseparable from their moral nature.

II. WE ARE ALSO RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CHARACTER OF OUR AFFECTIONS. Whence, for example, does murder derive its criminality? Not from the

act of taking human life in itself considered, for this may be done accidentally, or in self-defence, or as the minister of the law charged with the execution of justice ; but from its being a free act, prompted by a malicious intention. The taking of human life becomes murder only in consequence of this malice, which is wrong in its own nature, and is a violation of the law of nature and of God. We trace the responsibility of this act directly to the heart, from whence all corrupt and wrong desires proceed.

This malice may exist in combination with other moral affections which are wrong. A spirit of covetousness may light on the fact that one has gold about his person which another cannot transfer to himself but through the death of its lawful proprietor. Covetousness, therefore, may lead one to hate that life which is a barrier to his possession of the gold, although he never knew the victim of his malice, nor saw him till he was prepared to strike the fatal blow. In this case, malice originates in covetousness, and this covetousness is as wrong in its own nature as the malice which it inspires.

This principle is equally applicable to other cases of moral wrong with which we are conversant. They all have their origin in the free affections of the mind, which are in their own nature wrong. If, when fitted by their natural endowments to know and love God, men freely bestow their affections

on unworthy objects, and are thus led to do wrong, they are responsible both for their criminal actions, and for the wrong feelings from which they spring ; nor can they, with any propriety, be held to be responsible for their conduct, and yet not responsible for the wrong feeling which gives character to that conduct, and is the source of its criminality.

III. OUR RESPONSIBILITY ALSO EXTENDS ITSELF TO OUR BELIEF. Belief is the result of evidence. It is not the amount of actual evidence which exists in nature that controls the action of the mind, but the view which the mind takes of the evidence before it. Evidence, unless presented to the mind, cannot exert an influence on its opinions, for it is the same to it as if it did not exist. It is the view which the mind takes of the evidence before it, which controls its belief, and it becomes important to inquire whether there does not exist in the mind something which controls this view of evidence. Why do not those whose interests are opposed see the evidence alike which is presented in a court of justice ? It is because of the influence which their feelings exert to shape that evidence according to their wishes. Under the influence of biased feelings, men take only a partial view of the evidence submitted to them, and they are led to observe minutely those circumstances in the testimony which are esteemed favorable to themselves, and to undervalue those which are of an opposite tendency ; and this minute observation of one side

produces a biased opinion as certainly as if the testimony of one side only had been adduced. Here we reach a principle of admitted power over our belief, in accordance with which an interested juror or judge is excluded, the one from the panel, the other from the bench. So powerful is the influence of the feelings on our belief as sometimes to create in the mind a belief which is groundless, leading one to magnify reasons which are insufficient, to diminish those which are weighty, and to fancy that there are good and substantial reasons for an opinion where none exist; and it is its tendency to sway the opinions of the mind over to the side where its inclinations tend.

A ship cannot be propelled by the same physical power, with equal velocity, against wind and tide, as with them; nor will the same amount of evidence as readily produce conviction in a mind which is biased through feeling against a given point, as in one that is not. The currents of feeling which exist in the mind necessarily influence its views of evidence, and consequently its belief. Belief is the effect of evidence as it is viewed by the mind, and this view is controlled or modified by the feelings. So also is the belief. If we are responsible for the character of our affections, we are so for the moral acts which result from them, as the murderer is himself responsible both for the malice of his heart, and for the fatal blow which that malice incited. Our belief, so far as depend-

ent for its character on evidence as viewed by the mind through the bias of its affections, is as much a subject of responsibility as are the affections themselves ; and it is through these that we exert a certain and controlling influence over our own moral belief.

When we have demonstratively shown that belief originates in the heart, and depends on the heart for its character, we have shown the ground of our responsibility for its exercise. If there rest on us an obligation to any duty, it is to know and love God. This obligation is based on those moral endowments which enable us correctly to apprehend his character, and to feel those emotions toward him of love and gratitude which correspond to his relations to us. But if it is a duty to love God, it is equally a duty to believe in him ; and he is guilty for his neglect, who fails to take such a view of the evidences of his being, which are everywhere present, as to create in his own mind a proper belief respecting him. Or if, in place of God, he be led through a love for the pleasures of the world to set up a god of his own devising as the object of his worship, one whom he fancies to be pleased with his devotion to these pleasures, he is also guilty. So also is he guilty, if, out of love to the pleasures of sin, he be led to take such a view of evidence as create in himself an erroneous belief.

It were easy thus to canvass the various false opinions in which the wicked trust, and to show

that they have a common origin in the feelings of the depraved heart ; and such is the connection between these affections and a wrong belief, that in respect to their responsibility they stand or fall together. If we have any responsibility whatever, it is a responsibility which affects both the character of our affections, and of the belief which ensues from them. Either we are not responsible for the character of our affections, or we are for our belief ; and if not for the character of our affections, neither are we for our conduct. In other words, we are wholly irresponsible either to God, or to man, and are incapable of doing either a virtuous or vicious action. And this, according to the infidel maxim before us, is the moral position of mankind under the divine government ; for a denial of their responsibility in respect to their belief, inevitably deprives them of responsibility for their actions. And this is but a part of that system which is fitted to reduce man from his high post of dignity and accountability, down to the level of a mere puppet ; and it leads to a still deeper degradation of his moral nature—to the ruinous opinion that for his conduct in this world there is no future award, and that death is an eternal sleep.

Another form which this maxim sometimes assumes is, that “IT IS NO MATTER WHAT A MAN BELIEVES, IF HE IS SINCERE IN HIS BELIEF.” To be sincere, as it is here used, is heartily to assent to that which is affirmed to be true ; and the maxim

is designed to affirm that if one really believes, it is no matter what that belief is ; which is equivalent to saying that men are not responsible for their belief.

But it has been shown that men may take such views of evidence, through the bias of their hearts, as to believe any opinion which they choose, and that they are responsible both for their perverted affections and their erroneous belief. Confidence in our belief, or the sincerity with which it is indulged, arises not so much from the weight of evidence which really exists as from the view of it which is taken by the mind, which view is modified or controlled through the bias of the heart. Thus governed by the heart in their view of evidence, men may be as sincere in their belief of error as of truth. A change in the affections of their hearts will produce a material change in their view of evidence, and its influence will be exerted on the belief. Before his conversion, Paul thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, and was as sincere in his belief of error, as he afterward was in the belief of truth ; but when his heart had been changed, the character of our Saviour and the evidences of his divinity presented themselves very differently to his mind, and changed the character of his belief. A similar change of belief is often exhibited under our own observation as resulting from a similar cause.

Sincerity of belief, originating in the same cause

with the belief itself, partakes of the same character. It is not, therefore, true that it is no matter what a man believes if sincere in his belief, for he is as responsible for the sincerity with which he believes in error, as he is for the character of the belief itself, since it is from the free and responsible affections of the heart that both spring.

This view of the elementary principles of our moral belief is confirmed by the gross and destructive consequences which flow from the infidel maxim that men are not responsible for their belief. If it be no matter what a man believes, then all opinions on moral subjects are alike good, and conducive to happiness. There is no difference between virtue and vice, truth and error ; nor can any obligation rest on man to the exercise of virtue, for if he believe sincerely what he receives as true, it will sanctify this belief, and with it all the crimes which the depraved heart ever conceived. Nor does it matter whether we cherish the love of God, or the malice of those who hate him ; whether we assume his holy will as the guide of our actions, or the code of a pirate ; nor is it any matter how we feel or act, since the rectitude of our actions consists not in the nature of these actions as compared with God's holy law, but in the sincerity with which we believe them to be right : nor is it any matter whether God or Juggernaut receive our adoration ; or the Bible or Koran be the guide of our religious faith : nor is it any matter whether we believe in God, and

acknowledge his government, or deny his existence. Indeed, the Idolater, the Mohammedan, the Infidel, Atheist and Christian, on this principle all stand side by side, and are equally certain of receiving at last the divine approbation. So also, to treat Christ as an impostor, and utterly to deny his claim to our love, is the same virtue in the eye of the holy God as sincerely to receive him, and acknowledge him as divine. These are some of the consequences which flow from the sentiment that it is no matter what we believe, if sincere in our belief. It is one which aims to crush the divine moral government and to destroy the happiness of man under it, by divesting him of his moral responsibilities, and throwing wide open to him the door of worldly pleasure, that he may revel, without fear of the consequences, in all the sins to which he is prompted by the passions of a naturally corrupt heart.

Imbued with such monstrous principles, principles which are contrary to reason and to truth, the infidel is prepared to act his part in the drama of life. The practical operation of these principles was exhibited in France, during the Reign of Terror. Under the influence of works such as we have quoted, the people of that realm threw open the floodgates of licentiousness, and let in the tide of evil on their devoted country. The foundations of social order were swept away, law was prostrated, one dynasty of oppression succeeded another, to be

in turn supplanted by one still more licentious, and the blood flowed in torrents from the thousands, who were publicly massacred by the civil faction which had gained the ascendancy. The Deity was dethroned by acclamation ; and men, lost to virtue, became the deadly enemies of each other, and through mutual fear hurried one another to the guillotine. Jealousy, revenge, and cruelty assumed the place of love, and reigned without a rival in the heart. Men are not responsible for their belief, was the received doctrine of the populace, and a total disregard of all moral principle was the result. There is no future retribution, was the universal cry ; and the sentiment, " Death is an eternal sleep," was inscribed, for the consolation of the living, on the cemeteries of the dead. Having removed from the breast of man all fear of God, and divested him of every element of moral responsibility, they finished the gloomy picture of his degradation, by consigning his immortal spirit, with his body, to a common sepulchre.

And is a maxim so replete with mischief, and so barren of aught but misery, as that men are not responsible for their belief, to be received for truth ? Is the human mind so bereft of reason, so lost to virtue, and so wedded to its evil passions, as to accept for truth so pernicious a moral sentiment ? Far, very far indeed, must such a mind be from the influence of those principles which ought to control and govern it.

Contrast, with the delusions of error, the obligations which truth imposes. Can any requisition of our Creator be more clearly just, than that his intelligent creatures should know and love him? As proprietor of the world and its lawful Sovereign, is he not entitled to their homage? Has he not a rightful claim on their gratitude, and are they not bound by the highest obligations of duty to love him with all their heart, and to treat him with that reverence which is correspondent to his exalted character? There is in every breast a moral sentiment which accords with the justice of these obligations. They grow out of the relation which God sustains to us, as the obligations of a child to its parents do, from the relations established between them.

It is not only right that the intelligent creatures of God should be required to love him, but also to believe in him; and he has imparted sufficient evidences of his being and perfections to inspire their full conviction of the truth. The things that are made so illustrate his eternal power and Godhead, that the heathen even are inexcusable for their errors. Having given to the world sufficient evidences of his being and character, the obligation now rests on every man to acknowledge and love him; and he cannot but regard that man as justly responsible for his error, who, through the influence of a wicked heart, disbelieves his testimonies and changes his truth into a lie, that he may love

and serve the creature more than the Creator, who is over all, blessed forever.

These are the principles on which God righteously demands the obedience of mankind to the rules of duty, and suspends on this obedience their everlasting happiness; and men are under the same obligation to believe aright, as they are to feel and act aright. Faith, love, and obedience are sister graces, formed in the same celestial mould; and there is not in the universe a requisition more reasonable and just, than that which enjoins the reception of them on man as his duty.

Crooked paths there are, and there are those who love to walk in them; for “there is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death;” but all who choose these crooked paths in preference to that of obedience to God, shall meet at last a dreadful overthrow. “Whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace.”

CHAPTER II.

CONCERNING THE INFIDEL MAXIM, THAT THE LIGHT OF NATURE IS A SUFFICIENT GUIDE IN MATTERS OF RELIGION.

THE light of nature is a theme upon which, in distinction from the religion of the Bible and in opposition to its claims, infidels love to dwell; and they magnify this light as sufficient of itself to instruct and guide mankind into a knowledge of their duty. It is by his works, say they, that God makes himself known to mankind, and reveals the moral duties upon the observance of which their happiness depends; and this revelation of God through his works is sufficient, they contend, to teach man all that it is necessary for his happiness to know.

“The Word of God,” says Mr. Paine, “is the creation we behold; and it is in this word which no human invention can counterfeit or alter that God speaketh universally to man. Do we want to contemplate his power? We see it in the immensity of the creation. Do we want to contemplate his wisdom? We see it in the unchangeable order by which the incomprehensible whole is

governed. Do we want to contemplate his munificence? We see it in the abundance with which he fills the earth. Do we want to contemplate his mercy? We see it in his not withholding that abundance even from the unthankful. In fine, do we want to know what God is? Search not the book called the Scripture, which any human hand might make, but the scripture called the creation."

Again, in a discourse addressed to the Society of Theo-philanthropists, Mr. Paine says: "The universe is the bible of a true Theo-philanthropist. It is there that he reads of God. It is there that the proofs of his existence are sought and found. As to written or printed books, by whatever name they are called, they are the works of man's hand, and carry no evidence in themselves that God is the author of any of them. It must be in something that man could not make that we must seek evidence for our belief, and that something is the universe—the true bible—the inimitable work of God."

"The law of nature," says Lord Bolingbroke, "is the law of reason. A right use of that faculty which God has given us, collects that law from the nature of things, as they stand in the system which he has constituted." "The tables of the natural law are hung up in the works of God, and are obvious to the sight of all men, so obvious that no man who can read the plainest characters can mistake them."

“Human reason,” says the same author, “is able to discover in the original revelation every conceivable duty that we owe to God as our Creator, and to man as our fellow-creature.” And he adds, “If it does not follow necessarily from this, sure I am that it follows probably that God has made no other revelation of himself, and of his will to mankind.”

Respecting the fact here stated, that God reveals himself to man by his works, there is no difference of opinion between Christians and Infidels. The Apostle Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans, affirms the same fact with still greater distinctness. “For the invisible things of him,” he says, “from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead ; so that they [the heathen] are without excuse.” That God makes himself known by his works, is evident ; and we have no wish to detract aught from the light of nature, to exalt that of revelation. We receive both, and believe that the one is a more clear and full exhibition than the other. The only question is, whether the light of nature is itself a sufficient guide to man, in the circumstances of depravity in which he is placed, and whether it teaches all that is necessary to human happiness ? That this light would have been sufficient had he continued as he was originally created, holy, we need not doubt ; but that in the changed character and circumstances of

mankind in consequence of the apostasy, it is sufficient, may well be questioned. The changed condition of man from a holy to a fallen and sinful being, creates a necessity for another revelation from God to unfold the great system of redemption by which he purposes to deliver man from the curse of sin and restore him to holiness and happiness. Of this plan of redemption, the works of God fail to give us any intimations; and we might study these works forever without learning from them how God can be just and yet freely justify and save all who come to him in true repentance and with faith.

It is in consequence of the depravity of men that the knowledge of God has faded from their minds, and that the works of nature have failed, in every age, to convey any suitable impressions respecting men's duties to each other and toward God. In the Epistle to the Romans, the Apostle Paul not only states the clearness with which the Creator's attributes are displayed by his works, but assigns a satisfactory reason why these works fail to convey to men the knowledge which they are ready to communicate. "Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened; professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and

four-footed beasts, and creeping things.” “And as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind.”

The facts of human depravity are open to the observation and experience of men, and are put on record in the pages of history; and these facts must be appreciated, in all our estimates of the true value of the light of nature. Competent as this light may be for the guidance of holy beings, it entirely fails with respect to those who have corrupted their hearts, and are more inclined to sin than to a holy obedience. The powers and perceptions of our moral nature become blunted through the sinful indulgences of depravity. One who has yielded himself up to debasing and criminal pleasures, cannot gain as clear and satisfactory views of rectitude as one who has not come under such influences. The affections exert a powerful influence on the conviction of the mind, because they dispose it for or against the evidence adduced. The power of evidence to produce conviction greatly depends on the disposition of the mind to receive this evidence, and to decide in accordance with its claims. Evidence sufficient to guide an unbiased mind into the knowledge of the truth, may entirely fail to produce conviction in one whose affections and imagined interests are opposed to this truth. A virtuous person is more easily convinced of the excellence of virtue than a vicious person. Arguments addressed to a benevolent mind, result in

conviction, when they would fail to reach and move the understanding of a miser. The man whose chief happiness consists in sinful pleasures will not feel the force of arguments designed to show the criminality and folly of these pleasures. The affections of the heart, in such a case, oppose conviction, and exclude the evidence designed to produce it. In this way truth is divested of its power, and light is turned to thick darkness.

This explains why the light of nature fails to guide apostate man into the path of happiness. It hath lost its power, not through any innate imperfection, but in consequence of the state into which mankind have been brought by sin. So imperfect has become their moral vision as to require the clearer development of the will of God in the sacred Scriptures. We propose to show this from facts illustrative of the point as they exist both among the heathen, and those infidel philosophers who have claimed for the light of nature all the qualities of a perfect guide.

I. THE OPINIONS OF THE HEATHEN, AND THEIR SYSTEMS OF MORALITY BASED ON THEIR RELIGIOUS VIEWS, SHOW THAT THE LIGHT OF NATURE FAILS IN EVERY ESSENTIAL POINT TO IMPART THE TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND OF MORAL VIRTUE.

Plato, the celebrated Grecian philosopher, styled by the ancients the divine, who was born 430 years before Christ, in the beginning of his discourse respecting the Gods and the generation of

the world, cautions his disciples “not to expect anything beyond a likely conjecture concerning these things ;” and Cicero, who was born 105 years before Christ, and who had studied all the works of the philosophers who preceded him, in referring to the same subject, confesses that all these things are involved in deep obscurity. “If we had come into the world,” says he, “in such circumstances, as that we could have clearly and distinctly discerned nature herself, and have been able in the course of our lives to follow her true and uncorrupted directions, this alone might have been sufficient, and there would have been no need of teaching and instruction ; but now nature has given us only some small sparks of right reason, which we so quickly extinguish with corrupt opinions and evil practices that the true light of nature nowhere appears.”

Mr. Horne, in his Introduction to the Sacred Scriptures, gives a correct view of the state of the ancient heathen world. “The ancient heathen philosophers were ignorant of the true God, the creator and governor of the world, nor had they any clear or well-defined views of his nature and attributes, or of the duties flowing from our relations to him. Every country had its peculiar deities ; and whether they believed in them or not, the philosophers accorded in their worship with their countrymen, and enjoined it as the duty of all good citizens to follow the religion of their fathers.”

“The grossest Polytheism and idolatry prevailed among the ancient heathen nations. They believed in the existence of many co-ordinate deities, and the number of inferior deities was infinite. They deified the dead, and sometimes living persons; the former out of gratitude, the latter usually out of base and sordid flattery. According to the vulgar estimation, there were deities that presided over every distinct nation, every distinct city, every inconsiderable town, every grave, every river, and every fountain. Athens was full of statues dedicated to different deities. Imperial Rome, from political principles, adopted all the gods which were adored by the nations who had yielded to her victorious arms, and thought to eternize her empire by crowding them all into the capital. Temples and fanes were erected to all the passions, fears, and evils to which mankind were subject. Suited to the various characters of the divinities were the rites of their worship. Some were vindictive and sanguinary, others were jealous, wrathful, or deceivers; and all of them were unchaste, adulterers, or incestuous. Not a few of them were monsters of the grossest vice and wickedness; and their rites were absurd, licentious, and cruel, and often consisted of mere unmixed crime, shameless dissipation, and debauchery. Prostitution in all its deformity was systematically annexed to various Pagan temples, and was often a principal source of their revenues, and was, in some countries, even

compulsory upon the female population. Other impurities were solemnly practiced by them in their temples and in public, from the very thought of which our minds revolt. Besides the numbers of men who were killed in bloody sports and spectacles instituted in honor of their deities, human sacrifices were offered to propitiate them. Boys were whipped on the altar of Diana, sometimes till they died. How many lovely infants did the Carthaginians sacrifice to Moloch! What numbers of human victims, in times of public danger, did they immolate to appease the resentment of their offended deities!"

The wisest men of ancient Greece and Rome, the philosophers much revered for their learning, accorded with the religious customs of their nation. Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, and Zeno, the founders of the most distinguished schools of philosophy, were all ignorant of the true God, and of the worship which is his due. The same is true of Socrates and Cicero, all of whom were most esteemed for their wisdom among the ancients. They were not only ignorant of the true God, but of the creation of the world, and of the origin and cause of the misery which exists in the world occasioned by depravity, of the means of recovery from sin to holiness, of the pardon of sin, of the divine influence in the attainment of true virtue, of any certain knowledge with respect to the immortality of the soul, and of the nature and existence of future

rewards and punishments. They were all ignorant of the nature of true happiness, and differed widely as to the chief good of man. "Cicero informs us," says Mr. Horne, "that there was so great a dissension among the philosophers, that it was almost impossible to enumerate their different sentiments. More than three hundred different opinions on this subject are gathered from their works; and it is well remarked by Cicero that they who do not agree in stating what is the chief end or good, must of course differ in the whole system of precepts for the conduct of life." -

The practices defended and justified by the ancient philosophers correspond with the principles which they advocated. Self-murder, hatred, revenge, adultery, licentiousness, lying, theft, and rapine were practices not condemned, but in many instances defended by the wisest moralists and teachers of the ancient heathen world.

The same view of the world without the Bible is to be derived from an examination of the manners, customs, and religious opinions of the heathen in this age. The religion of the Hindoo acknowledges the claims of no less than three hundred and thirty millions of deities; and these gods are worshiped with rites the most impure, cruel, and ferocious, that are conceivable, and with human sacrifices. The different heathen nations occupying the vast countries of the East and the islands of the ocean have their own imagined deities, and

worship them with all the horrors attendant on Paganism. Human sacrifices and the destruction of new-born children are among the most detestable features of the worship which is practiced in most of those nations. In Africa, the same darkness reigns. The description of heathenism contained in the Epistle to the Romans is verified by the heathen of this age, according to the numerous travelers who have visited them. "Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness ; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity ; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful."

Facts like these respecting the character and condition of the heathen, in ancient and modern times, show that in spite of the advantages of the light of nature, mankind have failed to discover the truth.

II. THE OPINIONS AND CONDUCT OF THOSE INFIDEL PHILOSOPHERS WHO HAVE ADVOCATED THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE LIGHT OF NATURE, SHOW THE ERROR OF THEIR PRETENSION.

That modern deists and infidels have been able to conceive more clearly of what nature teaches than the ancient heathen philosophers, is to be ascribed to the light of revelation of which they enjoy the advantage, rather than to any acuteness of their own mental powers. The light of nature shone as

brightly in the eyes of Socrates and Cicero as in our own ; but in the sacred Scriptures it had not then been published to the world. And yet an examination of the opinions of those who have boasted most of nature's light will show how inconsistent and contradictory they are in their views of what nature teaches, and how far they are from that true light which enlightens men through the Gospel.

The first whose works we shall examine with this end in view is Thomas Paine, whose published opinions are often quoted in this work. He was born A. D. 1737. His chief production on the subject of religion is his *Age of Reason*. In the beginning of this work, he advances the sum of his religious opinions in two brief articles : " I believe in one God, and no more ; and hope for happiness beyond this life." " I believe the equality of man ; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow-creatures happy." This creed he afterward draws out more at length in the following articles, viz. :

1. " That the idea or belief of a word of God existing in print, or in writing, or in speech, is inconsistent in itself."

2. " That the creation which we behold is the real existing word of God, in which we cannot be deceived. It proclaims his power, it demonstrates his wisdom, it manifests his goodness and beneficence."

3. "That the moral duty of man consists in imitating the moral goodness and beneficence of God manifested in the creation toward all his creatures."

To this he adds, "I trouble not myself about the manner of my future existence. I content myself with believing, even to positive conviction, that the power which gave me existence is able to continue it in any form and manner he pleases either with or without this body; and it appears to me more probable that I shall continue to exist hereafter than that I should have had existence as I now have, before that existence began."

In accordance with his belief of the sufficiency of natural religion in opposition to that of Christianity, his most labored efforts were directed to overthrow the Christian faith and to demolish the authority of the Bible. He professed to regard the revealed word of God, the sacred Scriptures, as a book of forgeries and lies, and he endeavored by false statements and inferences, by ridicule and arguments addressed to the prejudices of the natural heart, to destroy its influence over the human mind. Few writers in any age have descended to such scurrilous abuse of sacred things as he. None can read his writings without perceiving the desperate enmity of his heart toward the religion of the Bible; nor can any one peruse the refutation of his errors by Bishop Watson, without being as much impressed with the Christian urbanity and sedulous regard

for truth of the one, as he is of the disingenuous and malignant spirit of the other.

Contemporaneously with Paine, flourished John Jacques Rousseau. He was born A. D. 1712. His religious sentiments are inculcated in his *Emilius*, or a treatise on education, and so far as it can be discovered, did not differ much from those of Mr. Paine. Professing a high degree of respect for natural religion, he does not appear to have any well-defined notions of the principles involved in it, or of the practices enjoined by it. "Had I been born," said he, "in a desert island, or never seen a human creature besides myself; had I never been informed of what happened in a certain corner of the world, I might have learned by the experience and cultivation of my reason, and by the proper use of the faculties God hath given me, to know and to love him. I might have hence learned to love and admire his power and goodness, and to have discharged my duty here on earth."

Notwithstanding this admission, he appears to be often at a loss in respect to what may appropriately belong to his creed; constantly averring that religion is the creature of education, and the impossibility of discerning truth amid so many conflicting sentiments. He raises difficulties and objections against the doctrines of revealed religion, and in doing so evinces his ignorance of the Bible and of its distinguishing characteristics. According to his own printed confessions, he was a thief,

a liar, and a debauchee ; and he defended the grossest immoralities. "What I feel to be right," said he, "is right, and what I feel to be wrong is wrong," thus vesting the morality of his actions in the judgment which he formed respecting it. A man of wit and genius, he lived in licentiousness, and died in a melancholy induced by his own debaucheries.

Constantine Francis Volney, another skeptic of the French school, was born A. D. 1757. The work in which his religious opinions are prominently set forth is his *Ruins of Empires*. Setting up the law of nature as a sufficient guide in matters of religion, he aims to destroy all other religions. The two principal arguments on which he relies are,

1. That religion is a creature of education, and that one is born a Christian, another a Jew, another a Mohammedan, and another a Pagan.

2. That all religions, both heathen and Christian, have their prophets, their sacred books, their martyrs and their miracles, and who is to decide between them ?

These opinions accord with those advanced by Rousseau and Paine ; but Volney, having traveled over Egypt and Syria, enters at large into the origin of the religious rites and customs of nations ; and while stating facts which are indisputable, he at the same time secretly insinuates his peculiar errors, so that before the reader is aware of the

danger, he has become fully prepossessed against the religion of the Bible.

Voltaire deserves our notice, in this connection. He was born A. D. 1694, and was one of the most elegant and fertile of the French writers. His works, as collected, are contained in seventy volumes. But it is in his Philosophical Dictionary that he chiefly advances his religious opinions. His whole object in writing against religion was to hold it up in contempt, and his motto in relation to Jesus Christ was, "Crush the wretch." In his attacks on Christianity, he makes no distinction between the religion of the Bible and the errors and absurdities of the Church of Rome, but pursues with indiscriminate and biting sarcasm all, without exception, who adhere to the Christian faith. His attacks abound in false statements and inferences; and he wields ridicule and satire as weapons best suited to his purposes; and it was from his armory that Paine supplied himself with his most effective shafts. In his moral sentiments, Voltaire was a libertine; and he advocated the unlimited gratification of the sensual appetites.

David Hume, the English historian, stands conspicuous among the English Deists and Infidels, as an able champion of their faith. He was born A. D. 1711. In his historical writings, he exhibits a method of attack on the Christian religion, of which Gibbon made great use; and by insinuating in connection with the facts of history motives which had

no existence, and remarks calculated to destroy all confidence in personal religion, he aims to bring it into contempt.

Mr. Hume's religious opinions chiefly appear in his Philosophical Essays. In these, he endeavors, on the system of Locke, who was a firm believer in Christianity, to rear a system of materialism. He advances sentiments which subvert the foundations of morality and religion, and aims wholly to set aside all proofs of a divine revelation.

He denied the being of a God by laying down principles of reasoning which necessarily destroy the proofs of his existence; and he left it for his followers to draw conclusions from them which he was unwilling or unprepared to promulgate. The argument on which he lays stress to show that we have no certainty in our conclusions concerning the relations of cause and effect, and cannot reason from one to the other, is, that we have no idea of that connection which unites the effect to the cause, or of the force, power, or energy in the cause which produces the effect; nor, consequently, any medium whereby we can infer the one from the other. Experience, he says, is the only foundation of our knowledge with respect to matters of fact, and to reason from nature to God is useless, since the subject is entirely beyond the reach of our experience. He not only denied the existence of any proof respecting the being of a God, but also denied the doctrine of the divine providence, and of future

rewards and punishments. Much of his strength is expended to show that miracles are incapable of proof by human testimony, and consequently that the whole fabric of revealed religion is without foundation.

In connection with these religious views, he advocated a system of morality, as appears from his private correspondence, which confounds the want of honesty with bodily infirmity, and reduces all crimes to the same category with diseases. He advocated adultery as necessary to happiness in life, and his moral sentiments on other subjects correspond to the same standard. His system of religious belief overthrows the foundations of knowledge and virtue, and his morality is that of the penitentiary and the haunts of shame.

Edward Gibbon, the author of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, was contemporary with Hume, and was born A. D. 1737. His religious opinions are contained in his historical writings. Into these he insinuates the poison of infidelity, and exhibits the operations of a mind bent on beating down the defences of the Gospel. He displays the follies and sins of those who professed the Christian religion, and the follies and sins of religion itself, and after the manner of Hume, aims to cast ridicule on the actions, and to asperse the motives, of all who maintain in sincerity the religion of the Bible.

Preceding Gibbon, is Lord Bolingbroke, who was born A. D. 1672. His works, which have

been much read and quoted, are published in five quarto volumes. His religious opinions are as follows, viz. :

1. That there is one supreme and all-perfect being, the original and eternal cause of all things, of almighty power and wisdom ; but that we must not pretend to ascribe to him any moral attributes, such as holiness, justice, and goodness ; and that to adduce moral obligations from these attributes, is enthusiasm and blasphemy.

2. That God made the world and established the laws of this system, at the beginning ; but that he does not now concern himself in the affairs of men ; or if he does, his providences extend only to collective bodies, and not to individuals.

3. That the soul is not distinct from the body, and that the whole man is dissolved at death.

4. That the law of nature is what reason discovereth to us concerning our duty as founded in the human system.

5. That from the clearness and sufficiency of the law of nature, it may be concluded that God has made no revelation of his will to mankind.

6. That it is profane to ascribe the Jewish Scriptures to God.

7. That the New Testament contains two opposite Gospels, that of Christ and that of Paul ; and that the doctrines of redemption, and future rewards and punishments, are absurd, and inconsistent with the divine attributes.

This scheme, which denies the moral attributes of God and his providence, the immortality of the soul, and all revealed religion, amounts to little else than the belief of a God who is only a creator, and who, having made the world and given laws to nature, concerns himself no more with men and their affairs. Lord Bolingbroke founded his system of morality in selfishness, and taught that ambition, the lust of power, sensuality, and avarice, may be lawfully gratified if they can be with safety to the individual concerned; that the sole foundation of modesty is vanity, or a wish to show ourselves superior to the brutes; that the chief end of man is to gratify his fleshly appetites and inclinations; that polygamy is a part of the religion of nature; and that adultery is no crime.

Thomas Chubb, who was contemporary with Lord Bolingbroke, was born A. D. 1679. In his posthumous writings, he advocates substantially the same sentiments, although he expresses himself with greater diffidence, and is more distrustful of his own opinions.

Within an interval of a few years, from 1654 to 1676, there appeared a number of skeptical writers, all of whose works partake substantially of the same characteristics. Among these are Charles Blount, Matthew Tindal, Thomas Woolston, Anthony Collins, John Toland, and the Earl of Shaftesbury. These labored chiefly to tear down the pillars of the Christian faith without aiming to

rear any system of their own. Their works were issued in quick succession against every assailable point of the religion and morality of the Bible. These called forth from Lardner and others answers, which have been the means of establishing the leading truths of Christianity on an impregnable basis.

Mr. Blount exhibited his system in seven articles taken chiefly from Lord Herbert, whose system will presently receive notice ; and Mr. Toland was a favorer and admirer of the doctrines of Spinoza, who will also presently claim our attention. The most polished and elegant of these writers is the Earl of Shaftesbury, who in his *Characteristics* represents the belief and expectation of a future state as of pernicious influence. Christianity, in his view, has no other foundation than the authority of the State. "For when," he says, "the supreme powers have given their sanction to a religious creed or pious writ, it becomes immoral and profane in any one to deny or dispute the authority of the least line or syllable contained in it." The magistrate, in his view, is the sole judge of religious truth, and may appoint what is to be believed or disbelieved. In addition to these opinions, he attacks the sacred Scriptures, and setting up ridicule as the test of truth, aims to set the truths and facts of the holy Scriptures in a ridiculous light. His writings, on account of their literary merits, rather than any great force of reasoning, have ex-

erted considerable influence on the spread of infidelity.

It was from Thomas Hobbes, who was born A. D. 1588, that Lord Shaftesbury derived many of his peculiar sentiments, particularly that revealed religion derives its authority from the supreme power of the State. Mr. Hobbes acknowledges the existence of God, but denies that we know anything more of him than that he exists. He asserts, that "by the law of nature, every man hath a right to all things and over all persons, and that the natural condition of man is a state of war, a war of all men against all men; and that there is no way so reasonable for any man as to anticipate, that is, by force and wiles to master all the persons of others that he can, so long till he sees no other power great enough to endanger him. That the civil laws are the only rules of good and evil, right and wrong, just and unjust, and that antecedently to such laws, all actions are, in their own nature, indifferent. That there is nothing good or evil in itself, nor any common laws constituting what is naturally just or unjust; that all things are measured by what every man judgeth fit where there is no civil government, and by the laws of society where there is one. That the power of the sovereign is absolute, and that he is not bound by any compacts with his subjects."

Mr. Hobbes also strikes at the foundation of all religion, natural and revealed, and aims to subvert

the authority of the sacred Scriptures and of God's moral government. His system erects an absolute tyranny over the human conscience, and takes away all right of private judgment in matters of religion.

Preceding him was Edward Herbert, Baron of Cherbury, who was born A. D. 1581. Lord Herbert was the first to reduce natural religion to a system, and was the most eminent of the early English Deists. He reduces his creed to five distinct articles.

1. That there is one supreme God.
2. That he is chiefly to be worshiped.
3. That piety and virtue are the principal parts of his worship.
4. That we must repent of sin, and if we do so God will pardon us.
5. That there are rewards for good men and punishments for bad men in a future state.

These he represents as common notices inscribed by God on the minds of all, and he undertakes to show that they alone are sufficient, and that nothing need be added to them. He designed in his writings to overturn all revealed religion, and to establish in its stead that natural and universal religion, the clearness and perfection of which he so much extols.

Benedict Spinoza must not be omitted in this description of skeptical opinions. He was the son of a Portuguese Jew, and was born at Amsterdam,

A. D. 1632. He was at the head of the system of modern Pantheism. His system makes the Deity himself material. He affirms the universe to be God, and that there is no other than the material fabric itself. To elude the objections which might be urged against his system from the divisibility of matter, he contended that matter is distinct from any of its modifications, and that when we shall have searched through all its forms, and reached the material essence of things, we shall discover the great first cause. The French philosophers during the revolutionary frenzy adopted his scheme, substantially of Atheism; and one of them had the insanity to announce that he hoped soon to be able to ascertain the particular form of crystalization which constitutes the Deity.

There are other forms of infidel opinion which have exerted some influence on the world, such as those advocated by St. Simon and Fourier, of the modern French school of infidelity, and by Robert Dale Owen and Frances Wright. The character of their views, and the moral influence of their doctrines, are too well known to need a comment. It is sufficient to remark that promiscuous concubinage, with all its attendant licentiousness, constitutes part of the system of morality advocated by the two last named; and that such are the principles which they profess to derive from the light of nature.

On a review of the opinions adduced, we may perceive how far the light of nature is a sufficient

guide in matters of religion, and how utterly it fails to meet the expectations of those who advocate its peculiar claims, as a substitute for Revelation. All the writers we have quoted agree in denying the sacred Scriptures to be a divine revelation; some on account of the alleged absurdity of its doctrines; some for want of sufficient proof; and some because such a revelation is unnecessary, since the light of nature is a sufficient guide to the knowledge of God and to happiness.

The most eminent heathen philosophers differed widely on the subject of religion and morals, so that more than three hundred different opinions on the nature of true happiness, and on the chief good of man, are discoverable in their writings; and both Socrates and Plato confessed that deep obscurity rested on these things; while the morals of the heathen have been such only as best accorded with the feelings of the depraved heart.

But when we come to review the works of those who have chiefly defended the sufficiency of the light of nature as a guide to happiness, we discover endless contradictions and obscurity. Some of them acknowledge the existence and attributes of God; others either wholly or in part deny them. Some profess a belief in his providence; others ridicule this belief. Some acknowledge the duties of repentance and prayer; others scoff at them. Some look for happiness beyond the present life; others maintain that the soul is material, and perish-

es with the body in the grave. Some admit rewards and punishments ; others deny them. Some receive the existence of a God ; others deny his existence. Some believe the universe itself to be God ; and one thinks he has almost discovered the particular form of crystalization which constitutes the Deity.

The only agreement in these authors is in the denial of revealed religion. But when they come to rear a system of their own, and to deduce from the light of nature the great principles of religion and morality, they differ most essentially. Among them all, there is not one who has educed a scheme of truth which is of any permanency or value. Whose shall we receive as the true system of nature, that of Herbert or Hume, of Bolingbroke or Hobbes, of Spinoza or Paine ? Who will give us the true light to enable us to build without mistake on the foundations of truth ?

Those who advocate the sufficiency of the light of nature, seem to be "in wandering mazes lost." One set of opinions is the antagonist of another. They agree only in pulling down, but when they come to build up each has a different plan, or a different mode, and builds in his own way. Instead of putting up a stately and beautiful edifice, they heap together an unseemly pile, without order and without design. All is confusion. One tears away what his predecessor has laid with unwearied pains ; and another casts down his work, to put up what in

its turn is torn down ; and thus, all their labor is thrown away. No one can candidly review the opinions which have been thus cast out upon the world without an overwhelming conviction of the falsity of that view which sets up the light of nature, in the present degenerate state of the human race, as a sufficient guide to man in matters of religion.

A similar diversity exists in the principles of morality as derived from the light of nature. In all the systems noticed we perceive an accordance of the principles, with the practices most loved and pursued. There is not a single crime prohibited in the moral law, which does not find an advocate or defender in some one of these various systems of falsehood. Every infidel whose works have exerted an influence on society has failed to advance a code of moral principles which will not excuse and justify licentiousness, and leave every individual to choose his own pleasures and to pursue them. Most graphic is the description of the Prophet, as applicable to them. "None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth. They trust in vanity, and speak lies ; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity ; they hatch cockatrice's eggs and weave the spider's web ; he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper. Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works."

We turn from the conflicting dogmas of infidelity

to the clear testimony of the Bible, as to a light shining in a dark place. Compare the obscure and opposite sentiments supposed to be drawn from the light of nature, with the moral law revealed in the ten commandments upon Sinai ; and, as a rule of duty, how low do the former sink in the contrast ? The rules of life which infidels exhibit are meagre, vague, and contradictory. There is no substantial truth at which we can arrive as their individual or united opinions. All is dark, incomprehensible, uncertain.

But when we turn to the moral law, the darkness is dissipated. Light bursts in upon us from the throne of God to illumine our moral sentiments. And we discover what, without a revelation, we might in our ignorance have never learned, that the religion inculcated by that law is the religion of nature. How any one can fail to perceive this, is accounted for only by the strength of prejudice. That law need only to be studied and understood to be approved by every conscience as right.

In respect to God, it commands the love and reverence which is his due, and forbids idolatry, profaneness, and impiety ; and in respect to man, it enjoins filial obedience, and forbids every crime. There is nothing right which it does not enjoin, or wrong which it does not prohibit. When it says, "*Thou shalt not kill,*" it forbids the exercise of malice in every form. When it says, "*Thou shalt not commit adultery,*" it commands the restraint of

all the baser passions of the heart. When it says, "*Thou shalt not steal*," it prohibits the disposition to appropriate to one's self that which is not honestly his own. When it says, "*Thou shalt not bear false witness*," it reprobates falsehood and tale-bearing between man and man. And when it says, "*Thou shalt not covet*," it lays its prohibition on every selfish desire whose exercise tends to the injury of mankind.

Perfect obedience to this law insures perfect happiness. It is the law of nature and of God. It is the only code of morals in the universe which is not defective. And it is on this law that all those precepts of human enactment which are conducive to the true interests and happiness of man, are built. The wisest men in all ages have acknowledged this, and the most eminent jurists have conceded to this law, considered merely as a rule of life, a perfection which they have ascribed to no other.

Compared with it, how obscure, and dark, and contradictory are the deductions of depraved and fallible men from the light of nature ! And we may say of them as the sacred poet says of the ancient philosophers who were without God :

" Let all the heathen writers join
To form one perfect book :
Great God, when once compared to thine,
How mean their writings look !
Not the most perfect rules they gave
Could show a sin forgiven,
Nor reach a step beyond the grave :
But thine conduct to heaven.'

The sacred Scriptures reveal to man, in his apostate state, the knowledge of his duty in so clear and distinct a manner as to lay on him the responsibility for his ignorance, and for his final ruin, if he do not obey their wise teachings. They conduct him to heaven. If he follow the opinions of men, and endeavor to walk by the rules of duty which they have set up, he must wander in darkness, and never come to the light ; but if he obey the precepts of the Gospel, he cannot fail to reach heaven at last. In the one case, he has ignorant and fallible man for his guide ; in the other, God himself, who by the teachings of his holy word instructs him, and by his Spirit conducts him safely, amid the dangers which encompass him, to the perfect enjoyment of life and immortality.

CHAPTER III.

CONCERNING THE INFIDEL MAXIM, THAT IF WE ACT ACCORDING TO OUR CONSCIENCE, WE CANNOT ERR.

SOME writers describe the conscience as a moral sense, which intuitively decides what is right in morals, as the palate distinguishes what is sweet or bitter in taste. Others set it up as the standard of morality, assuming that, if we act agreeably to our conscience, we cannot err. There is no subject, of equal importance, respecting which more false and dangerous opinions are commonly entertained. It is proper, therefore, in this connection, to inquire into the nature of conscience, and to determine whether, in any sense, it may be regarded as the infallible guide of our moral actions.

Conscience is an impulse of the mind, prompting us to do what we think to be right, and to avoid what we deem to be wrong, and which awakens in us sentiments of remorse for not doing it. It is a principle which is inherent and constitutional. We naturally approve of that which we think to be right; and no man can prevent the emotion of approbation or disapprobation from being awakened in his mind, in view of those moral actions which are presented to his consideration. We view an accidental death very differently from

a cool and deliberate murder; and such is our moral constitution that we cannot, in any circumstances, approve that which our judgment condemns as wrong, or condemn that which our judgment approves as right.

It is true, that men are sometimes banded together by a selfish interest to do some nefarious deed which they know to be wrong; but they do not, in the commission of it, enjoy the approbation of their consciences. Indeed, so little confidence do they repose in each other, in consequence of knowing each other's destitution of moral principle, that not unfrequently deep-laid plots of villany have been defeated through the mutual suspicions of those who were to be the actors. Often have crimes been confessed, and accomplices been surrendered up to justice, merely through the force of conscience. This sits within the breast like an inflexible judge, and can neither be bribed nor won to give its sanction to any known or acknowledged crime. Often have the plans of the wicked been defeated through its invisible agency. Often has the murderer, who has thrown over his crime the veil of inscrutable mystery, been dragged from his dark recess through the powerful convictions of his own breast.

Of the existence of the conscience, every man is fully conscious. But to gain a correct view of its nature, it is proper to observe, that the judgment we form of a moral action invariably precedes the

emotion of approbation or disapprobation awakened in view of that action. We do not first feel an action to be right, and then judge it to be so ; but we first judge the action to be right, and then approve it. This will be evident on reflection. I extend my arm, for example ; this act, in itself considered, is not worthy of praise or blame, it being only the motion of my muscular powers, in obedience to my will. I put forth my hand to feed the hungry and clothe the naked ; it is a good action, and something within my breast immediately approves it. I put forth my hand to murder or to steal ; it is a wicked action, and something within my breast immediately condemns it. In either of these cases, the action is first viewed as good or bad, before the emotion of approbation or disapprobation is awakened ; and I approve of the one because I deem it right, and condemn the other, because I judge it to be wrong.

That we form a judgment of the qualities of a moral action before we approve or condemn it in our conscience, is further evident, from the instances where a change of moral judgment has been instantly followed by a change in the moral emotions of the mind. Paul, in persecuting the Church, acted in accordance with his moral judgment, and felt in his conscience an approval of his course. "I verily thought," said he, "that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth ;" but when his moral judgment

of his own conduct had been changed on his conversion, he saw that he had done wrong, and confessed himself to be the chief of sinners, because he had persecuted the Church of God.

If we first felt an action to be right, and then judged it to be so ; or if conscience were a moral sense, competent to decide what is right in morals, as the palate to decide what is sweet in taste, how could Paul have had such different feelings in respect to the same acts ; and how can it be accounted for that the same act is, by different persons, so differently regarded ? Human nature is everywhere the same. That which tastes sweet or sour to one, tastes the same to another, the same both to the civilized and the savage. And if conscience were a moral sense, capable of discerning what is right in morals, as the palate discerns what is agreeable in taste, this diversity of feeling in respect to moral objects could have no existence, but the same act would seem right or wrong to the whole family of man.

But this is not true, as may be discovered by an examination into the opinions and feelings of men. Some, in heathen nations, regard suicide and infanticide as meritorious acts, holy and acceptable to their gods ; but we view these acts with abhorrence. The Hindoo deems the self-sacrifice of a widow, on the funeral pile of her husband, to be right, and, therefore, approves and commends an act which the more enlightened and humane con-

demn. These are but samples of that diversity in judgment and feeling existing among mankind in respect to the same moral actions.

Conscience, therefore, bears no resemblance to a moral sense, since it gives such different decisions as to the quality of our moral actions. The emotions which these actions occasion derive their character from the moral judgment which is first formed of them. They constitute no standard of rectitude, because the judgment itself may be erroneous; and in consequence of a wrong judgment, one may approve of wrong, thinking it to be right.

This will appear if we reflect on the various ways in which men are liable to form an erroneous judgment. One is, by adopting a wrong standard of rectitude. The rules with which we compare our actions, to determine whether they are right or wrong, are our standard of rectitude. With these, we invariably compare our conduct, and if it accords with them, pronounce it right; if it differs from them, wrong. If our standard of rectitude be wrong, and we shape our actions according to that standard, our actions will be wrong also. Hence, the diversity in the various standards of rectitude assumed by men will account, to a considerable extent, for the diversity of their moral judgments.

This standard differs, according to the differences in the religion, laws, and customs of men. False religions, human laws, and the received opinions, maxims, and customs of men, all exert an influence

to constitute or modify their standards of rectitude. A heathen, who derives his rules of rectitude from the will of an idolatrous priesthood, judges to be right, and honestly approves in his conscience, those acts which Christian nations view with unfeigned abhorrence. We may discover, by careful observation, that in the rules of action which constitute the standard of rectitude among different men, there is a wide diversity of sentiment. These standards of rectitude cannot all be right, because they conflict with each other. It is impossible that opposite principles of moral virtue should both be right. The same moral action cannot be wrong, and at the same time be right. If the rules of moral conduct differ from each other, and the conduct be conformed to them, it will invariably result in the formation of conflicting judgments; and some will be led to approve of wrong, thinking it to be right, in consequence of adopting a wrong standard of rectitude.

Again, a wrong moral judgment may be formed in consequence of indulging wrong affections. These exert a pernicious influence in two several ways. First, by leading men to adopt for the guidance of their actions a wrong standard. Guided by their feelings only, men will not adopt a standard of virtue which will condemn themselves. A band of pirates, in the code of laws regulating their conduct, will not regard the immutable principles of virtue, but will frame such a code as will tolerate

rapine and murder, and will punish with death every offence committed against the secrecy of their operations, or the ties of brotherhood by which they are held together in the commission of crime.

In Christian lands, the received principles of religion, and human laws, and customs, exert an important influence over the standard of popular virtue. But this influence is often counteracted by a natural aversion in men to adopt as theirs a standard of virtue condemnatory of the practices which they love. Some who entered on life with a high standard of moral virtue, have become so debased by a life of sinful indulgence, and so disturbed by an avenging conscience, that, to silence its reproaches, they have been compelled to lower down their standard of virtue, till their principles and practices could go hand in hand. Hence it is that loose and vicious principles are often assumed by licentious men, to cover up or justify their own vicious practices. Often does it occur, under our own observation, that he who, through temptation, sinks down, step by step, into debasing crimes, will change his religious opinions to accommodate this change in his life; and will become a universalist or an infidel, to save himself from the reproaches of his conscience. Thus it is that the conscience becomes seared, and its sensibilities blunted. Men sear their consciences when they lower down their standard of virtue into an accordance with their sinful practices. Guided by their

inclinations only, they will not set up as their standard of virtue principles which will condemn themselves. They would as soon spread for themselves a bed of thorns. They will ever aim to sink the rock of eternal truth and virtue so low that their own bark may glide over it. They will not wish it to rise above the level of their own moral feelings, exposing themselves to be dashed upon it and lost. Hence it is that men are always influenced by wrong affections to adopt a wrong standard of moral virtue.

Again, wrong affections influence men to form a wrong decision, even in view of a right standard. In their intercourse with each other, they practically admit that they are liable to form a wrong judgment through the influence of biased feelings. Why is an interested juror excluded from the panel, and an interested judge from the bench, unless because liable to err in judgment, in consequence of their feelings of interest? So, also, in respect to morals: men are as liable to err in their judgment through the bias of interested feelings, even when they have a right standard. They may err when they have implicit confidence in the rectitude of their own opinions. Neither talents, learning, experience, nor age, can exempt them from the danger of such errors.

Those who have the most confidence in the rectitude of their opinions, will find themselves opposed by others who as honestly differ from them,

and who are equally ready to risk their property, life, and eternal happiness, on the truth of their opinions. The Christian and heathen are opposed to each other in their moral judgments, and they cannot both be right; nor can the multitude of conflicting opinions on moral subjects all be true, though each have its advocates, and be confidently affirmed, and boldly defended.

If, through the influence of wrong feelings, and the adoption of a wrong standard of virtue, men may err, and even approve of wrong, thinking it to be right; and if, in different circumstances, the conscience may give opposite and conflicting decisions, and may approve of conflicting principles of moral virtue, can it, in any sense, be regarded as the standard of rectitude; since it is evident that, governed by wrong feelings, and acting in view of a wrong standard, men may be conscientious in their actions, even when these actions are invariably wrong?

Conscience is not, therefore, a standard of rectitude. It approves what we judge to be right, and condemns what we think to be wrong; but it secures no man against the influence of an erroneous judgment. Governed by pure and holy feelings, and by a just standard of rectitude, the moral judgment will be right, and conscience will give its approbation to its decisions; but influenced by depraved and unholy feelings, and by conflicting opinions of moral virtue, what can save the con-

science from being moulded by prejudice, darkened by ignorance, and perverted by sinful bias? In such circumstances no reliance can be placed on it.

This strikes a fatal blow at that system of infidel morals which extensively prevails in some communities. It shows that the light within, which they set up as their guide of life, has no reality. There is no innate light in the human conscience which is competent to guide depraved man aright. There are no moral impulses proceeding from the truth or Spirit of God which are enjoyed by all, and constitute a sufficient directory into the way of peace. The conscience is not, and cannot, become the guide of our moral actions, since all of its judgments are formed in view of some standard of rectitude, and this standard is not everywhere the same.

This is a point in morals of such vital importance, as to justify a more extended illustration. It is admitted that there is a natural and just distinction between right and wrong. All moral actions are properly distinguished into several classes. An act of mercy is viewed by us with very different emotions from one of rapine and of blood. Whatever may be the errors respecting their moral actions, yet all admit an essential difference between them. Some actions are regarded as right, and others as wrong, according to the standard of rectitude which each adopts. But this standard differs in the view

of different men, and how can we decide which of these standards is right?

Nothing is more common than for men to speak of morality as of a subject well understood. Morality is a term ever on the lips of some, as constituting the whole of their religion, and their password at the gate of heaven. Yet there is no term in our language more indefinite and less understood. What is morality? It is conduct according with some acknowledged rule of moral rectitude; or in other words, which is regarded as morally right. When we say of one that he is a moral man, we mean that his conduct is generally correct, according to our notions of morality. But how do we know that it is correct, unless by a comparison with some standard? Morality not only implies such a standard, but it is evident that every one's views of morality will be governed by the standard which he adopts. The views of men on this subject always differ with the standard which they assume. The morality of the Hindoo requires a rigid adherence to cast, and commends self-immolation under the ponderous wheels of an idol's car. The morality of the South Sea Islanders permits them to bury alive their aged parents, and to put to death their infant children. The morality of the ancient Spartan commended theft as a virtue. The morality of the Jew demands abstinence from pork; of the Mohammedan, from wine; and the morality of the Indian of our forests is, never to

forget a favor or an injury ; and these all differ from the morality of the Christian.

In lands enlightened by the Gospel, there is as wide a diversity of opinion respecting morality as there is in pagan countries. The morality of one permits him to reduce his fellow-man to a hopeless bondage; of another, to take the life of his fellow-being, by providing him the means of intoxication and death; of another, to encourage his servant to lie, to avoid the company of those who are disagreeable; of another, to kill his friend in mortal combat on the duel-ground; and of another, to profane God's holy name, or his Sabbath. The gambler, the thief, the midnight assassin, and the debauchee, all aim to adopt a code of morals which, in their view, will palliate, if not excuse, their several crimes.

Men generally make their own opinions of what is right the standard of their moral actions. But these opinions are ever various and conflicting. A uniform and consistent expression of the nature of moral virtue cannot be derived from them. Whose opinion shall be regarded as right, and by what standard shall the conflicting claims of morality be settled? Neither the human conscience, nor the expressed opinions of men, enable us to ascertain in what moral virtue consists. Who, then, shall decide the question, and be acknowledged as the proper arbiter in the case?

If we search out all that is in man, we shall all

feel satisfied that there is no standard of moral virtue in his heart. And if we extend our observation to every land, and mark the conflicting opinions of men on moral subjects in every age, we shall perceive that it is not to man that we must look for guidance. Amid the diversity of moral sentiment which everywhere prevails, the mind is bewildered; nor should we ever be able to discern the path of true virtue, did we not have a "lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path," in God's holy word. Through this, we may look up to One who sitteth in the heavens, and who laughs at the pride and presumption of man; and we may rejoice that it is the Christian's joy and confidence to know, that what God approves is right, and what he condemns is wrong.

From these principles, it follows, that the law of God is the true standard of moral virtue, and the only proper guide of the conscience. We are bound, out of regard to our happiness, to infer the existence of laws which we know, from our experience, to be essential to the public safety. One may be ignorant of the language and of the statutes of a particular country which he visits, yet regard for his own safety teaches him to infer the existence of such laws as are necessary for the adequate protection of property and of life. Ignorance of our laws would not justify a foreigner landing on our shores in proceeding to fire our houses, or take away life. That consciousness of

natural justice, which is the law of God written on the heart, and which every one measurably possesses, is sufficient to render his condemnation just, on the principle, that he should have inferred, that what is so obviously inconsistent with social security, is, by the law of the land, prohibited.

In view of the diversity of moral sentiment among mankind, and the fact that the individual and united wisdom of men have failed to recognize and establish a standard of rectitude, it is evident, either that there is no difference between right and wrong, or that there is some standard given for our guidance, and which all men are conscientiously bound to observe.

But, that there is a difference between moral actions, all must acknowledge. Some actions are held to be right, and others to be wrong. If there is this difference in the quality of our moral actions, how may it be determined what is right or wrong unless by a comparison with some standard? And where is this standard to be discovered? Not, as we have shown, in the laws and customs of men, nor in the human conscience. If there is such a standard, it is discoverable only in the law of that infinite God, under whose government we live.

We may, therefore, safely infer that God has made suitable provision for the necessities of our moral nature, and has furnished ample means for the guidance of our conscience. From the blindness and ignorance of men on moral subjects, there has arisen a necessity for legislation on the part of

God. And if we are bound to infer the existence of laws which are indispensable to our safety in the society in which we live, so are we equally bound to infer the existence of God's holy law as the guide of our moral actions. As, under human government, it would be madness to venture on crime in the hope of escaping with impunity through our ignorance of the law, so the Psalmist pronounces that man to be a fool who has said in his heart there is no God, and who seeks neither to know nor to obey him ; who observes on every hand around him, the works of his power, and is not convinced of his being ; and that there is one who reigns over men, eternal and supreme, the arbiter of right and wrong, the benevolent lawgiver and judge of men.

But where is the law which he has given to be discovered ? First, in the material creation. But when men failed, through their depravity, to gain a clear discernment of their duty from his works, he graciously revealed his law in the Holy Scriptures. In ten brief precepts, he has comprehended all the duty of man ; and on these precepts, as is acknowledged by the wisest expounders of human law, is all that is just and conducive to happiness in the laws of men founded.

This law is the perfect standard of rectitude. When disturbed by the conflicting sentiments of men, we turn our eyes to this holy law as “ the lamp to our feet and the light to our path.” The

morality which it teaches is the only perfect morality. Regard for the morality of men will gain you only the favor of men. If you wish their good opinion, you may have it by conforming to their principles and practices. Go where you will, and do what you please, you will always be approved by men with whose sentiments and conduct you yourself accord. And on the same principle, if you would have the favor of God, you must conform yourself to his standard.

Is the morality which his law demands so strict that you cannot conform yourself to it, and points out sins of your past life which must forever condemn you? Turn, then, to the Gospel, and learn for what Christ died ; that it was to make expiation for your sins, and open to you the door of forgiveness through his blood. The law points to the cross, and is our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ ; and we can no more rationally doubt the existence of this law as the guide to conscience, than we can doubt the existence of that God from whom it emanated.

Again : though the law of God is the true standard of rectitude, and the only proper guide of the conscience, yet every man may discover in himself enough that is wrong, as estimated by his own standard, to condemn him. Every man, whether governed by the law of God or not, has some standard of rectitude with which he compares his conduct. Men all make a distinction between virtue

and vice, right and wrong. This distinction may not be based on the law of God, still it exists, and constitutes in their view a law which they are conscientiously bound to observe. This is their standard of virtue, and their conscience is bound to its observance.

But is it true, in point of fact, that any man acts in perfect accordance with his own rules of rectitude, and enjoys the uninterrupted approval of his conscience? We do not ask whether his conduct accords with God's holy law, but whether it accords in every particular with what he himself judges to be right.

Is there one who can affirm in the presence of God, who searches the heart, that he has always done what he himself thought to be right, and avoided what he judged to be wrong? Where is the man who can wash his hands in innocency, and affirm that he has never done an action which he himself thought to be wrong, and for which he felt the disapprobation of his conscience? Who is there that can say that he has never neglected to do what he thought to be right, and has never done that which he judged to be wrong? What, is there not one who has never felt the disapprobation of his conscience for anything he has done, or neglected to do; not one on earth who can truly say, "I have never done what I thought to be wrong?" On what, then, is his morality founded; and how can he escape the remorse of a guilty

conscience, since by his own principles and by his own standard of rectitude he is condemned?

Again—the only remedy for a convicted and guilty conscience is the forgiveness of sins through the Gospel. It is the great end and aim of the Gospel to set forth the way of forgiveness through Jesus Christ; and there is no human conscience so defiled, there is no guilt so deep, no heart so polluted with sin, that the atoning blood of Jesus cannot wash away its stains. This is the remedy for a guilty conscience. It confers upon it peace. “Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Sweet peace thy promises afford,
And give relief to fainting souls.”

It is evident, then, that we may act agreeably to our conscience, and yet err in consequence of a wrong standard of rectitude adopted, or the wrong feelings indulged in view of a right standard; that God’s holy law is the only true standard of our moral actions, and the proper guide of our conscience; that no man is free from a guilty conscience, because there is no one who is not conscious that he has never acted in perfect accordance with his own standard of rectitude; and that the Gospel becomes necessary, therefore, as presenting to view the only proper remedy for a guilty conscience, through the forgiveness of sins for the sake of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. All of which

truths are commended to your serious consideration, in view of that solemn account which every man must give of himself to God in the final day.

CHAPTER IV.

CONCERNING THE SKEPTICAL MAXIM, THAT, IF THE LIFE
BE RIGHT, IT IS NO MATTER WHAT ONE THINKS OR
BELIEVES ABOUT RELIGION.

IT is a common opinion of irreligious men, that the character of our belief is of no importance ; that if one's life be right, it is no matter what religious sentiments he adopts ; and that his religion may assume the form of Mohammedanism, Idolatry, or Infidelity, without serious detriment to his future welfare. This sentiment pervades the writings of such men, and we need only remark, that it is a common maxim of infidelity. Pope, who was himself inclined to skepticism, and was the associate of some of the master spirits of infidelity, gives it the sanction of his authority when he says,

“For modes of faith, let graceless zealots fight,
His can't be wrong, whose life is in the right.”

So influential is this sentiment as understood and applied in a wrong sense, and so generally is it received as expressive of truth, that it becomes important to illustrate the fallacy of its pretensions. It is an opinion more often met with than almost any other, as falling from the lips of irreligious men, that if one be honest, kind, free from open

vice, and escape the censure of men, he need not trouble himself about religion ; and that if his life be right, a just God will not condemn him, whatever he may think or believe beside.

The whole force of this sentiment turns on the supposition, IF THE LIFE BE RIGHT. What constitutes a right life ? Is it one inspired by holy principle, all of whose actions are prompted by a love of virtue ; or is it a life conformed externally to what men generally esteem as right ? If the former, then it includes a proper religious belief ; for no man can perfectly conform himself to the great principles of his duty and yet be an infidel. His actions, if they are right, include a holy confidence in God as their inspiring motive ; and, in accordance with the saying of Christ, “ If any man will do my will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether I be of God :” an obedient life will insure a proper faith. No one who conforms his life, in all points, to his duty, can treat God with disesteem, or indulge sentiments of unbelief respecting him ; his life will be a religious one. But it is one of the most common practices of irreligious men, to take a sentiment which by possibility of construction may be true, and apply it to express an untruth. Thus the sense in which this maxim is designed to be understood, is far inferior to the one just noticed. If one be honest, kind, and of good reputation, he is generally regarded as possessing the merit of a right life ; his morality, it is affirmed, is all the

religion that he needs ; if he have this, it is said, a just God will not bring him into condemnation for not having those religious views and feelings which constitute man a Christian.

This opinion involves a denial, as will soon be made apparent, that there is any real connection between principle and conduct, motive and action, faith and virtue ; and unless this connection be allowed, how are we to judge what is right or wrong ? On the supposition that a right life is one conformed to the opinions and customs of the community in which one lives, we shall have different views of rectitude according with the varying opinions and customs of different nations.

Some communities esteem it right to destroy their infant children, and to offer up human sacrifices ; some practice as right the most degrading vices and horrid crimes. What kind of a life must that be which is conformed to such practices ? According to this skeptical maxim as generally understood, it must be right. It becomes of great importance, therefore, properly to distinguish the truth in respect to what constitutes a right life, separate from every false pretence.

Suitable reflection must convince every one that a right life is one conformed to the duties which are obligatory on us. If we fail in duty, our life cannot be right, for it is defective in that which pertains to rectitude. If honesty be a duty, a right life demands conformity to this virtue ; and a failure in honesty is a failure in the life.

Our duties spring from our various relations to God and to each other. Parents are bound to nourish and instruct their child, and to fit it in the best manner for the sphere of its duties ; and the child is bound to love and honor its parents. These mutual duties grow out of a mutual relationship. The relationship creates the duty. So, also, there are duties toward each other as members of society, which arise out of our associations in life. And there are duties also toward God, which, as creatures, we are bound to perform. If he is our creator, and we are dependent on him for everything we enjoy in life, and even life itself, there is no other being in the universe who so properly demands the supreme affections of our hearts. We are bound to love him more than we do any other being, more than we love ourselves ; yea, to love and serve him with all the powers of that life which he has conferred ; and the obligation to this duty commenced with our life, and will be perpetuated during our intellectual existence.

Great, and indispensable to our happiness, are the duties to God, which are included in a right life. Those which we are under to men constitute but a small part of our obligations. It is a faithful observance of all our duties which a right life demands. It includes supreme love to God, and the practical observance of all the duties which flow from this love. It includes belief in him, and a life conformed to the principles of true piety as set

forth in his holy word. It includes, in a word, both the principles and practice of true religion ; and he whose life is conformed to the whole of his duty, is a friend to God and a truly religious man.

But this is a very different life from that supposed to be right by irreligious men ; and which includes some of the duties obligatory on us, but leaves those which we owe to God neglected. Lord Bolingbroke expresses the common sentiment of this class of moralists, when he represents “ that God made the world and established the laws of this system at the beginning ; but that he doth not now concern himself in the affairs of men.” There is no God to notice the conduct of men, is the language which the Psalmist puts into the mouth of one devoid of understanding ; and it is, to a greater or less extent, the sentiment of those who think that a life can be right, and yet God be left out of it, as an object of love and reverence. Such a life is as imperfect and sinful as it well can be. It fails in every respect of that rectitude which it should possess.

1. IT ASSUMES THAT A REGARD FOR SOME OF THE MORAL DUTIES OF LIFE IS ALL THAT IS REQUIRED OF MAN, and that God, and the duties flowing from our relations to him, may be properly treated with neglect. It therefore fails of rectitude, as certainly as children fail of it who are kind to each other, but treat their parents with contemptuous disregard ; and it would be as proper for such children

to say, if our life be right, it is no matter how we treat our parents ; as for the moralist to affirm, if the life be right, it is no matter how we think or feel respecting our duties to God.

Between our obligations to God, who is our creator, preserver, and benefactor, and those we are under to men, there is no comparison. When we lie down at night, it is God who protects us while we sleep ; and when we rise refreshed, his providential care guards and defends us. It is he who gives us health, reason, and ability to advance our own happiness. He stands in the kindest attitude toward us, as one earnestly solicitous for our good ; and to love him with all our heart is the duty which rests on us, in view of all his mercies. This duty commences at our birth. When we first open our eyes in this world, our relationship to him becomes invested with responsibilities in us, commensurate with our rational and accountable natures. The love we owe him is superior to that of any other relationship ; all others are inferior ; this alone is supreme.

The obligation to obey is associate with that of love. In the relation which he sustains to us, we are morally bound to make his will the guide of our actions, and the directory of our life. Those who shut God out of view and the duties they owe him, while they claim the merit of a life that is right, on the strength of the duties done to their fellow-men, fail of the rectitude they claim, be-

cause no life can be right which treats God with such indifference. He is entitled to the chief place in the affections, and receives none. They who would severely censure the dishonest man, scarcely think of God, whose preserving care is manifested toward them every moment, and never think of him as they ought. They live upon his earth, eat his food, enjoy the privileges purchased for them by the sacrifice of his Son, revel on his bounties, and yet turn away from his proffers of reconciliation and love, with the most profane contempt. He who should treat an earthly benefactor thus, would sink very low in the scale of moral goodness as it is estimated by men. And does not a failure in the duties flowing from our relations to God occasion such a marked defect in the life, as to destroy all claim to its rectitude? Is not the life itself an utter failure as to the great end which a life should have in view?

This personal neglect of duty to God, so destructive of all virtue, has also associated with it an example and influence which are wrong. Men who do not love and obey God themselves, not only fail to exert a good influence on others, but lead them to dishonor God, and treat him with the same indifference. An irreligious parent may send his children to church, and teach them conformity to the reputable customs of society, but his influence as a parent is not directed to lead his children to honor God by an observance of those duties which

are associate with love, but to neglect their heavenly benefactor. How is it possible that the example of a prayerless man, who never takes God's name on his lips but to profane it, or of a moralist, who treats his duties to God with neglect, can have any other influence on his children than to lead them into the same error? And this influence passes from the family circle into the community at large, and works its fatal mischief there.

Many there are, ready to claim the merit of a right life, who are guilty of great impiety toward God, blaspheme his name, desecrate his Sabbath, and indulge in such secret violations of his law, as would destroy their reputation if published to the world. They narrow down the duties of life to a point where they think they shall be able to escape censure, and then claim the merit of rectitude for a life which is vitally defective. They strike out its most important duties, as having no concern in them, and then strive to establish their reputation for moral goodness on what remains. They set God, their Creator, aside, whom they have treated most injuriously, while they claim the virtue of having never stolen their neighbor's purse, nor abused his person. It seems nothing to them that they have thus treated God ; it is all they claim, to have abstained from what men regard as disgraceful. A negative virtue is all that they assume to possess ; and yet, even the praise of this negative

virtue must be denied them. It will be seen that this is not a true virtue, if we consider,

2. THAT THE LIFE WHICH THEY PARADE BEFORE US AS THE GROUND OF THEIR JUSTIFICATION, FAILS OF RECTITUDE AS TO ITS GOVERNING MOTIVE. The motive from which an action is performed must be right, or the action itself cannot be good. A motive is that which determines the will in the choice of any object. As here used, it is the internal principle from which an action springs. The motive is part of the moral action itself, and is that which imparts to it a character. There can be no moral act without a motive. It is the malicious motive which stamps a homicide as murder. We inquire after the motive to ascertain the character of the act. He who acts without motive is destitute of reason ; and he who acts from a wrong motive is a wicked man. Because the motive is wrong, it does not hence follow that the action, in itself considered, is wrong also. An action ostensibly good, may be bad because prompted by a wicked motive. Should one receive a stranger to his home, apparently through hospitality, designing to rob and murder him in his sleep ; or should one treat a family with kindness, to betray and ruin one of its members, the kind act in itself considered would be good ; but when viewed as proceeding from its proper motive, its character would be changed. To ascertain the true character of a life, it is indispensable

to investigate its governing motive ; for it is possible for one to be honest, kind, and of good reputation in his life, and yet to be governed by very wicked motives.

Take your plain, downright honest man, as he claims himself to be, and inquire if supreme love to God is the ruling motive of his life ? It evidently is not ; for he sets his honesty over against that religion which consists in supreme love to God as being superior to it. If this love were the inspiring motive of his honesty, it would extend its influence further than to the relative duties he owes his fellow-men, and lead him to observe his duties to God, and conform his life to his blessed Gospel. To supreme love to God, there is but one alternative as the governing motive of life, and that is supreme love of self. It is a duty to love ourselves, but not more than we love God. We are commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves, which implies that self-love is a proper emotion. But when it rises to excess, and exceeds our love to God, it becomes supreme, which is but another term for selfishness ; for selfishness is the supreme love of self.

There is a vast difference in the characters of two men, one of whom loves God supremely, and the other supremely loves himself. Two men, partners in trade, may pursue their business from day to day, and be equally honest, obliging, and kind in their relations to each other and to society ; but

one of them acts from a motive of true Christian benevolence, and labors to amass wealth that he may expend it for the education and moral improvement of his children, and the advancement of true virtue and happiness in the world ; the other labors to amass wealth to use it for his own individual gratification or personal aggrandizement, or he has in view as the great object of life, to use the wealth thus acquired to overthrow the liberties of his country that he may exalt himself to a throne. His motive, whatever it may be, is a mercenary and selfish one. These two men resemble each other in their several actions, but not in the governing motive of their life ; and the one is a good, the other a wicked man. This explains why two men may be alike kind and honest in their intercourse with men, and yet be very different in their real characters. The one may be a true Christian, the other an infidel ; the one a benevolent and holy man, the other base and wicked.

Honesty toward men does not necessarily imply love to God, for it may spring from a motive supremely selfish. It is a common mistake to infer from this honesty that one is governed by a love of true virtue. It is true that a love of virtue will insure honesty in the life, and no man can love God supremely and not be a truly honest man ; but honesty may exist without this love, and may spring from a motive growing out of a supreme love of self. There is many a man who

would scorn a dishonest action, because he respects himself too much to be guilty of it. There is an inbred sense of honor, and a self-respect which are associate with self-approbation, and naturally tend to inspire honesty. This love of self-approbation exerts a powerful influence. No man wishes to feel degraded in his own eyes, as he would be in the eyes of his fellow-men, by an act of injustice. A wise man naturally prefers virtue for the pleasure it affords. It leads one to think better of himself, and to applaud his own goodness when he acts right toward others ; and this is one of those motives subordinate to the supreme love of self which influences man thus to act.

The fear of a disturbed and avenging conscience is another influential motive of the same character. Every man loves to have a conscience void of offence if he can ; and there are many who are led to do right through fear of disturbing their own mental tranquillity if guilty of a base action. There is also a fear of God which is subordinate to supreme self-love, and which is merely a selfish apprehension of ruining one's self in his estimation and provoking his wrath ; and this is doubtless very influential in disposing the mind to right feelings on the subject of moral honesty.

So also is there a love of family, of position in society, and of character, which goes far to secure in man worldly honesty ; for there is no one so foolish as to think that he can do a moral wrong

and not run the risk of exposure; and when exposure is ruin, the fear of it becomes an influential motive to do right. These inferior motives are all subordinate to a supreme love of self; and when their separate and united influence is considered, they present very powerful motives to render one honest. They exert a great influence on individuals, and on society at large, and yet the proper fear of God does not enter into them. One may be influenced by these considerations to be a down-right honest man, and aim to preserve a good conscience in all his transactions with his fellow-men, and yet act from no higher motive than supreme love of self.

There is a natural generosity of disposition, also, which is frequently called into exercise by those who have no love to God. They are kind-hearted, and give liberally to benevolent objects, objects which are right, and which their conscience approve as right and tending to do good. They are of a generous nature, and find a pleasure in acts of generosity; or they are prompted by a love of self-approbation, which leads them to wish to esteem themselves and enjoy the esteem of others; or they hope to merit the divine favor. These, and other like motives, are exceedingly influential in exciting the benevolent action of those who have no love for God. These virtues are not to be condemned; they are to be commended so far as they go. It would be better for society if the whole world should

imitate their example; and it would be better still, if the governing motive of their conduct were such as to stamp these actions with the character of true virtue. Men may go very far in doing externally what is right; they may be exemplary in all their domestic relations, kind parents, and mindful of their duties to God, so far as their external conduct is concerned; they may gather their families around the domestic altar, and offer to God the morning and evening sacrifice of prayer and praise; they may seemingly be all that is right and good, and yet fail of doing anything from a right motive.

But if a man be honest and kind, it is said, what matter is it from what motive it proceeds? The motive enters into the nature of every moral action, and imparts to it a character; it constitutes the difference between an accidental homicide and a murder; it renders the life one of friendship, or of hostility to God. One may be honest and kind out of a very wicked motive. He may wish to gain the confidence of another to ruin him. Malice instead of benevolence may be the motive of this apparent kindness. And is there no difference in honesty and kindness as prompted by such a motive, and as prompted by true virtue? If chastity proceed, not from a love of virtue, but from the restraining fear of detection, is it a moral virtue or a mere selfish policy? Or if honesty arise from a love of self-approbation, or those other influences proceeding from supreme love of self, is it a moral

virtue, or a mere act of expediency? Can a life inspired by supreme devotion to self be other than wicked; does it not virtually exclude Jehovah from the throne in the affections of the mind, and exalt sinful man in his place?

A life governed by such a motive is not capable of true virtue, and is devoid of moral principle, in its legitimate sense. He who is governed by such a motive, acts without reference to God; he casts himself upon the stream of popular opinion, and floats with the current. If he refrain from open vice, it is not regard for God, but for himself, which exerts a restraining influence over him. Externally, his actions are right, and such as become a man; but viewed as to their motive, they are such as no good man can respect; for it is impossible to respect one as kind, when it is discovered that a selfish motive lurks in that kind act, and that self-approbation, and not a benevolent regard for the one to whom this kindness is shown, is its spring.

There is no true virtue in yielding to such a motive, or in being influenced by one of fear, as the child is who obeys his parent from dread of the rod, and not from love. Yet these inferior motives, springing from a supreme love of self, are all which influence the mere moralist to do right. If his life is reputable, it is so because, through a selfish regard for his own interest and happiness, he yields to these motives, which prevent him from doing wrong. It is not supreme love to God which influences him to do

right, but supreme love of self. His virtue arises from the circumstances of restraint in which he happens to be cast, and is merely accidental. There is nothing in his heart, no love of virtue, and of God, which causes him to do right, for the great principle which governs him admits of his doing anything which he thinks would promote his interest and happiness, irrespective of its being right, and such as God would approve. The thought of God's approval of his conduct never enters his mind, as worthy of a moment's consideration. Just so far as he conceives it to be for his interest or happiness, he will aim to do right; but he will not go a step beyond; and when duty to God comes into conflict with what he esteems to be for his happiness, this duty will be neglected, and selfishness will triumph over virtue. He loves rectitude no further than he conceives it is for his interests to regard it, and this regard must therefore yield when brought into such a conflict. Supreme devotion to self is the governing motive of his life; and, in view of it, what becomes of that virtue which he claims as of such value, that it may be set up in contrast with religion? It is gone. It becomes only a virtue of expediency, and not one of moral principle, because its motive is devoid of true rectitude. He is an honest man, it is true, but it is the honesty of expedience and self-interest, not the honesty of true virtue, and of uncompromising, holy principle. It is honesty which fails in

its application to his duties to God ; and this failure is fatal to the hopes founded on it. It is a selfish policy, and not a principle of true virtue, on which it is based. It fails in motive, and this failure is fatal to the claim of rectitude. The life may be commendable in the view of man ; but God sees through the hypocrisy in which it is veiled.

3. The life we have described is defective, because IN ALL ITS ACTIONS, AND IN EVERY PARTICULAR, IT FAILS OF TRUE VIRTUE. There is a class of actions often held up to view as commendable, which are devoid of moral character. The kind feelings of a mother toward her babe, inspiring devotion to its wants, and protection and defence even at the sacrifice of personal comfort, are of this class. Are these not evidences of moral rectitude toward God such as will commend that mother to his favor? So many think, but without any ground for the opinion. It is right for the mother thus to watch over her babe ; and she may do it without a thought of her duty to her Creator, and even while she is in heart an atheist. Besides, the parent brute manifests an equal regard for her young ; do we infer that love to God reigns in the brute because of a natural affection toward her offspring so strong that it cannot be surpassed by man ? This parental kindness has no moral quality, for it is not prompted by a motive of true virtue ; and yet, it would be exceedingly wicked for a mother to abandon her child. It is no moral virtue in one to

love his country ; and yet it would be exceedingly base in him to betray it. This class of actions, which involve no moral quality, resemble others arising from our natural feelings, which are destitute of moral character when preserved within appropriate limits, and become wrong only from excessive indulgence or neglect.

The most intensely devoted parent may fail of rectitude through a substitution of his child for God as the object of supreme attachment ; and this devotion may proceed only from a supreme love of self. The parent loves himself supremely, in loving his child so devotedly ; and he forgets the claim which God, as a Father, has upon his love. If it were right principle which governed him, he would not give all his affections to the child, and yet defraud the glorious Jehovah of his dues. His love of virtue would be manifested by the observance of all the duties he owes both to God and man. He would be as fearful of offending God, of profaning his holy name, of desecrating his Sabbath, and of doing in secret what he knows that heaven will not approve, as he would of cheating his neighbor, and of being held up to the community as a dishonest man.

If the principle on which we profess to act fail to include obedience to God, and conformity to his Gospel, it is wrong. There can be no true virtue in a life based on such a false principle. Proper views and feelings toward God constitute the mo-

tive of all right actions. No life can be right which leaves God out of view, and the duties we owe him. Religious faith is the inspiring motive of a correct life. To confide in God, involves love and obedience ; nor can any one act from supreme regard to his glory, whose mind is not imbued with an inward principle of faith. Hence, it is said, that “without faith, it is impossible to please him.”

As man, in the great apostasy, fell by distrust, so is he recovered by faith. Faith is the way through which a supremely selfish man returns back to God, confides in him, and loves him. True religion is synonymous with true virtue, and both are attained through “repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” So complete are the evidences which God has set before us, not only of his own character, but of the way of salvation through Christ, that he reasonably demands of his intelligent creatures on earth both faith and love ; and faith, when it becomes active in the soul of man, is the spring of all true obedience.

But he who would distinguish a right life from that faith in God which is its motive, shows that he does not know what a right life is ; for he assumes that to be right which is vitally defective. Instead of its being no importance what our views and feelings toward God are, it is of the utmost consequence that they should be right, that our life itself may be governed by them, and become right also. But to transfer the merit of a few ac-

tions which are externally blameless, to the whole life, and assume it to be right because of these actions, is like setting a cone upon its point, with the expectation that it will stand, or building a huge fabric on a single pedestal; or with more aptness it may be said, it is like attempting to build a castle in the air.

This is the attempt of the mere moralist. He pleads the merit of a right life to excuse his neglect of religion, when he is entitled to no such merit, and when his life, as to its rectitude, is a complete failure. Not a single action of it has been performed out of love to God; not one done from a right motive. Instead of being good, and acceptable to his Creator, he may be most wicked. He may treat Jehovah with more profound disesteem than others do, may exert a more pernicious influence on society, and do more to break down the cause of true virtue in the world; and though he may escape human censure, yet all his apparent virtue may be forced and heartless, and merely negative in its character, like that of the Pharisees whom our Saviour compared to whited sepulchres, fair on the outside, but within full of dead men's bones, and all uncleanness.

Such a man lives to himself. He casts off God as his sovereign, and will not be in subjection to the holy principles of his government. Most groundless become his pretensions to a right life, when that life has no acknowledgment of his Creator as

the object of supreme affection and reverence, and when the only god he regards is his own adored self. Paramount to the claims of virtue and religion, he sets up his own will. This is his god, and the supreme sovereign of his heart. All the principles of virtue which he acknowledges are those of his own creation. Of his moral actions he claims to be the sole arbiter. He thus aims to displace the eternal Jehovah from his throne, to elevate himself in his stead. He would make truth, and virtue, and even God himself, subject to his will. He thus inflicts the deepest wound on that glorious being who has created him, and yet claims himself to be right, and his wicked life to be a good one.

This is the position assumed by those who trust in their moral life as superior to a religious one ; and who, while they think on their honesty to men, are ready to trample in the dust their obligations to God, as of no importance to be regarded. Can any presumption be greater ? What can be more wicked than to adopt the sentiment which has been considered, and make it, as thousands do, the only basis of future hope ? Will God acknowledge the validity of a principle so dishonoring to himself, so destitute of moral virtue ? Is there any foundation upon which such a principle may be made to stand ? Will a holy and just God tolerate it ? It is impossible that he should, unless he can lay aside that holiness which is essential to his nature, can descend from his throne, and lay his crown

and sceptre at the feet of man—the very man who sets himself up in hostility to his person and his reign.

Do you purpose, then, to set off your life against the just claims of your Creator? Be sure that you have a life perfectly conformed to rectitude, which you may thus offset. Know, that a failure here must strike you down forever. If your life be not perfect, there is sin to repent of; and how can you present a life that needs repentance, to justify your neglect of repentance? How can you appear before God, who searcheth the heart, pleading the merit of a life which is wrong in its actions, wrong in motive, and imperfect and sinful in all its parts? Be sure that what you claim as a right life is so in reality, before you presume to venture your eternal happiness on a foundation so insecure. Know that God must be loved, honored, confided in, and adored, by all who would enjoy the quiet of a good conscience, and the peaceful hope of heaven. But woe to the man who, trusting in the merit of a moral life as an excuse for neglecting religion, shall, at last, make the discovery, that it is a life devoid of such merit, because destitute of right principle, and an utter failure as to the great end for which life has been conferred! Woe to him who stumbles at the threshold of truth, and will not enter, because he has no heart to love God, and is determined that he shall not reign over him!

CHAPTER V.

CONCERNING THE SKEPTICAL MAXIM, THAT RELIGION IS
THE CREATURE OF EDUCATION.

IN our examination of infidel opinions, we cannot proceed far before we discover a maxim which has the confidence of skeptical men, and is regarded by them as one of their strongest arguments, and a main pillar of their system. It is affirmed that religion is the creature of education, and that the religious opinions and characters of men are derived from the circumstances into which they are introduced at birth. "Those born in Christian lands," says Rousseau, "are Christians, and those born in heathen countries are pagans. The Turk, the Jew, and the Christian, all receive their religion from their fathers. The heathen mythologists had their deities and their miracles, and the Christian mythologists have theirs. To think that God will make any difference in men for what is the result of education only, is contrary to the known principles of his moral justice."

Says Mr. Paine in his letter to Mr. Dean, "As to the people called Christians, they have no evidence that their religion is true. There is no more proof that the Bible is the word of God, than that the Koran of Mahomet is the word of God. It is edu-

cation makes all the difference. Man, before he begins to think for himself, is as much the child of habit in creeds, as he is in ploughing and sowing. Yet creeds, like opinions, prove nothing."

Says Rousseau, in his *Treatise on Education*, "The faith of children, and, indeed, of many grown persons, is merely an affair of geography. Are they to be rewarded with heaven because they were born at Rome, and not at Mecca? One man is told that Mahomet was a prophet, sent by God, and he accordingly says that Mahomet was a prophet, sent by God; the other is told that Mahomet was an impostor, and he also says that Mahomet was an impostor. Had these two persons only changed places, each would have changed his tone, and affirmed what he now denies. Can we infer, from two dispositions so much alike, that one will go to heaven and the other to hell?"

Again, says Rousseau, "If the son of a Christian does right in adopting, without a scrupulous and impartial examination, the religion of his father, how can the son of a Turk do wrong in adopting, in the same manner, the religion of Mahomet?"

Volney, in his *Ruins of Empires*, sets up as one of the pillars of his system, the sentiment, that "a man is born a Christian, or he is born a Moham-medan, or he is born a Pagan."

The prominent sentiment presented to view in these statements is, that religion is the creature of education. In examining a maxim so commonly

received by skeptical men as truth, it is important to fix definitely the meaning of its terms. When it is said that religion is the creature of education, what are we to understand by religion? It is a term used by some to express the religious forms and customs of society; and as used in this sense, it is true that children usually conform to the religious customs of the community in which they live. The Mohammedan observes the precepts of the Koran, the Brahmin those of the Shaster, and the Roman Catholic those of his peculiar faith. But this use of the term does not express its real and full import. Religion does not consist in the forms and customs of a Christian people, but in a suitable acknowledgment of our obligations to God, and in the observance of the duties which flow from this acknowledgment. This is true religion as it is distinguished from every other form of belief bearing its name.

So, also, the term Christian is susceptible of as wide a latitude of meaning as is religion. A Christian may represent one who is born in a Christian country, and who observes its religious customs only; or, one who truly loves God, and conforms his life to the practical duties which love implies. When it is affirmed that religion is the creature of education, it is falsely assumed,

1. THAT RELIGION CONSISTS IN THE FORMS AND CUSTOMS OF A CHRISTIAN COUNTRY, AND IN THESE ONLY.

This is the great error of Rousseau, which is

discoverable in all his writings. He seems never to have thought that there is a religion of the heart separate from these forms and customs, and which inspires a practical observance of the duties which God requires. Educated amid the errors of the Romish Church, and conversant only with its worship, its pretended miracles, and the insincerity and abandoned lives of its priesthood, he formed his opinions of the Christian religion from this unworthy model; and when, with other systems of religion, he contrasts the Christian, he seems to have no other conception of it, than as consisting in a prescribed round of heartless ceremonies.

This view of religion is common to skeptical men. "Religion," says one, "in its most common acceptation, is a complex idea compounded of three things totally distinct from each other: the first is the observance of certain rites and ceremonies, such as circumcision, baptism, fasting, and many other external symbols, which have by some been considered as the sum-total of religion. Secondly, there is included in the idea of religion an assent to certain metaphysical propositions, such as the nature and properties of the Supreme Intelligence, the extent of his interference in the affairs of the world, and the nature and essence of the human soul. Thirdly, the word religion has also included in it an approbation of some system of morality supposed to be adduced as a necessary inference from the articles of belief." Never was

there given, on any subject, a more false description. Skeptical men have attempted thus to fasten on Christianity the errors and absurdities of its nominal professors, and they have therefore entered the arena of discussion prepared to show that this religion is no better, and no more conducive to happiness, than is that of the Koran or the Shaster.

Volney, in his *Ruins*, introduces representatives of the various religions of the world, each of which, it is pretended, sets forth its peculiar form of belief; and Christianity, among the rest, is represented by the unsupported dogmas and the forms and rites of the Romish Church. In this, and in his entire argument, it is assumed, that the Christian religion consists in external forms only, like the religion of Mahomet or of Vishnoo, and has no proper influence over the affections of the heart.

The same error pervades the religious writings of Paine, and, indeed, of most skeptical authors. In attacking what they call religion, they aim their shafts at some rites, ceremonies, or opinions which pass under that name, and which, compared with the true religion of the Bible, are no more than the froth or scum of the vat to the pure and sparkling liquor which it conceals.

The fallacy of the position, that religion is the creature of education, may be easily detected by an appropriate definition of terms. It means one of two things: either that men, by education, naturally fall into an observance of the religious cus-

toms of their fathers; or that by education they come to love God supremely, and to observe the duties which devolve on them as his intelligent creatures. In the sense first described, it is undoubtedly true; but in the second, which is the only legitimate meaning of religion, it is not. As used to describe merely the external forms of religion, it is easy to accord with infidel writers as to the power of education to mould the religious habits of man, and to render one a Mussulman, Jew, or Pagan, according to the circumstances of his birth. But when it is affirmed that by education men come to acknowledge their obligations to God, and to observe the duties flowing from this acknowledgment, the assertion is unfounded.

The same fallacy exists in respect to the different uses made of the term Christian. A Christian may be one born in a Christian land, and who conforms to the customs of society which there exist; or he may be one who supremely loves God, and obeys his Gospel. The term Christian is susceptible of these two different meanings; and the fallacy consists in applying that which is true of one only, to both. In the premises, the Christian is regarded as the inhabitant of a Christian country in distinction from a heathen one; in the conclusion, as one who supremely loves and obeys God. Now it may be true that one is born a Christian, in the sense that he is a member of a Christian community in distinction from a pagan one; and yet it may

be true that he is not a Christian, because he has never known by his experience what true religion is, nor received Christ by faith as his Saviour. Here are two senses in which the term Christian is commonly used. Infidelity asserts what is true of one, designing to include the other also, in respect to which it is not true. It affirms that one is born a Christian in the same sense that the Hindoo is born a pagan, and it attempts covertly to insinuate that there is no other religion, and thus to sweep away Christianity by making it only the creature of circumstances. But it leaves out of view the fact that one may be a Christian in this sense, and yet not a Christian in the legitimate use of the term, because he is not a converted man, nor a professed follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. The maxim that religion is the creature of education falsely assumes, that THERE IS NO TRUE RELIGION AS DISTINGUISHED FROM ITS VARIOUS COUNTERFEITS. It classes the various systems of belief together under the name of religion, as having equal claims on our regard, but does not hint a remote probability that there is a true religion in the world which is capable of being distinguished from falsehood. It overlooks the fact that there is one whose truth is evinced by its including a practical observance of the duties which we owe to God and to our fellow-men. From the diversity of opinion which exists on the subject of religion, it falsely assumes that there is no true religion existing in the world;

with equal wisdom as if one should infer that amid the many counterfeits there is no true coin; and as if the very existence of a spurious currency did not prove that there is one which is genuine.

3. This infidel maxim FALSELY ASCRIBES TO TRUE RELIGION THAT WHICH IS TRUE ONLY OF MEN AS THE INHABITANTS OF A CHRISTIAN COUNTRY. It affirms that those born in Christian lands are Christians in distinction from Jews or pagans, because they observe the manners and customs of the society in which they have been reared. This, no one can doubt; it is what every one has known and acknowledged from his childhood.

But when it is attempted to apply this acknowledged fact to the true religion of the Bible, and to affirm that one is born into the possession of supreme love to God, and into the practice of the duties which flow from it, as one is born a Mohammedan or a pagan, its falsity becomes apparent. This will be evident from a consideration of the nature of true religion, and of the way in which it gains possession of the human mind.

True religion, as has been already remarked, consists in the acknowledgment of our obligations to God, and the practice of the duties which this acknowledgment involves. The religion of nature and that of the Bible are identical, both requiring us to love God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves. The Gospel is only a remedial system designed to recover mankind back from the apostasy

sy to the supreme love of God, and to a correspondent life. Amid the numerous systems of idolatry and the forms of belief which are prevalent in the world, how is true religion distinguishable? Its distinctive feature is, that it includes in its belief a practical observance of duty toward God and toward man. So evident is this test, that no man need be deceived respecting it. The idolater is as clearly inexcusable for not discovering, and yielding to the influence of true religion, as is the nominal Christian; and the child of Mohammedan, as is the child of Christian parents.

Amid the numerous religions of the world, there is one which is true; it is the religion of the Bible, consisting in supreme love to God and in a life correspondent to this love. And it may be laid down as an evident truth, that any system of religious belief which does not include in it this supreme love and obedience to God is false. If we apply this test to the countless systems of religious belief, we shall at once be enabled to detect truth from error.

Idolatry, for example, does not include the possession of right affections toward God, but is a virtual denial of his being. It allows mankind to make their own deities, and to endow them with such a character as is pleasing to them. Instead of rendering up to God the supreme affections of the heart, idolatry deifies the depraved inclinations of the soul, and leads man to worship only himself. If addicted to intemperance, he can pay his adora-

tion at the shrine of Bacchus; if to lust, to the Cyprian goddess; if to revenge and war, he may follow the bloody Mars into the ensanguined field. Idolatry is a system from which the suitable acknowledgment of God is excluded, and is therefore false.

The same is true of infidelity. It does not exert any practical influence on the life to conform it to those duties which our relation to God involves. The drunken, licentious, blaspheming, and debased, may cherish a full belief in the dogmas which represent the creed of the infidel, and yet neither acknowledge the claims of God on man, nor aim to fulfill the duties which flow from them.

But true religion, the religion of nature and the Bible, leads men directly to God in the confession of their sins, to receive his forgiveness, and to obey from the heart all those duties the practice of which love to him inspires. This religion proceeds not from birth nor education, but from the free choice of man as influenced by the truth and the Holy Spirit. It is not the creature of education, nor is any man ever born into its possession; but it arises from the free action of every mind. Paul was not indebted to his education for that eminent piety which shone forth in his life. Had his religion depended on the force of education only, he would have lived a Jew, as a Turk lives a Mussulman, and for the same cause, and would never have become a Christian.

That those who are reared in Christian lands are more enlightened than the heathen, that they enjoy superior advantages, and come under influences peculiarly favorable to true religion, cannot be denied. But that they love God and believe in Jesus Christ as a necessary consequence of this, is not true. Education cannot create in any mind the love of God, for it has no power over the heart to fix its affections supremely on Jehovah, and to mould them into conformity with his will. It can neither produce the love of virtue in the heart, nor its practice in the life. It had no power to mould the heart of Paine into the love of God; it could not even check his career of infamy, and save him from a drunkard's miserable end.

If religion were the creature of education, we should see it produced, oftener than we do, in the lives of those who have been religiously educated. Whereas, it often happens, that the children of pious parents despise their birthright and cast off the fear of God, while those of skeptical and vicious parents become true Christians. Unconverted men, reared in families where his name is revered, do not on this account necessarily love God. We do not say that they are not placed in more favorable circumstances to become religious, but that this result does not depend on education alone; for it is apparent that one who enjoys by birth the best opportunities to become religious, may remain as entirely destitute of love to God, and of a practical obedi-

ence to his law, as if he had been born and educated in a pagan land.

True religion is not the result of accidental circumstances, but is the free choice of the mind, acting in view of its responsibilities, and influenced by the motives of truth and by the Holy Spirit. No man becomes a Christian by birth. It is only through a spiritual renovation that he becomes one. This moral transformation is effected through his free choice of God as his portion, and a heartfelt reliance on Jesus Christ as his Saviour. His acknowledgment of God and faith in Jesus Christ is ever accompanied with a practical obedience of his commands. It is not from education, therefore, but from choice that men become true Christians; and this choice is the result of the divine influences exerted to convert and save.

Many who are born Christians in distinction from pagans, are as entirely destitute of true religion as are the heathen. They live without God in the world, and love darkness rather than light, because they prefer to act out their sinful desires without restraint; and they flee into the mazes of error to escape the reproaches of conscience. There is as wide a diversity of moral sentiment in the inhabitants of a Christian country, as there is between the true Christian and the idolater; and in many of Christian birth, there is as real indifference to religion, as powerful opposition to the truth, and as marked an enmity to the government and person of

the true God, as is discoverable in the heathen. To include as real Christians all who inhabit a Christian country, and to argue from this that religion is a creature of education, is a specimen of that sophistical reasoning by which infidels sap the faith and delude the minds of those whom they would lead astray.

True religion is a subject of experience. But the mass of those who inhabit a Christian country have never experienced its power on their hearts and lives. From not gaining a true perception of its nature, therefore, and governed only by the eye, they mistake for it the external form, and what appears to be true of one, they unhesitatingly ascribe to the other. To this, are the false statements and fallacious arguments of skeptical men to be ascribed. Practically denying the claims of God on their love and service, they teach that there is no responsibility to be attached to human belief, and consequently none to human conduct; that it is education that makes all the difference; that whether one love and obey God or not, depends not on the free choice of man as responsible for his actions, but on the circumstances into which he has been born. Consequently, he is not responsible either for his belief or conduct. Whether a man love God, or pay his adoration at the shrine of Juggernaut, on this principle, depends entirely on circumstances above his control, and for which he has no responsibility. Sin, on this principle, be-

comes the creature of education; and for a man born of vicious parents and nurtured in sin, to carry out into action any of the sinful plans he indulges, is not criminal. If he is by education an idolater, a robber, a pirate, or a murderer, he may pursue it as an honest calling, and one in which, as he is capable of committing no crime, he is amenable to no punishment. These are the legitimate consequences of this maxim. It is designed to remove from man all responsibility for his moral actions, and to give him up to pursue with impunity the cherished purposes of his depraved nature.

But no man can reasonably deny the obligation and duty of loving and obeying God. This duty is inculcated by natural religion; and where love to him exists, it disposes the mind to cherish proper views of God, and of his works, and of his word. But a mind under the influence of wrong affections will naturally misinterpret his character. It fears his power and trembles at his wrath. It aims to exculpate its disobedience by false representations respecting him.

While a wicked heart misleads those who trust in it, a heart right with God will guide the anxious inquirer after truth aright. Responsible for the possession of a right heart, men are responsible for those views of truth and sentiments of religion which flow from it. And on this ground it is, that men are responsible for the possession of that true religion which consists in right affections toward

God, and a life corresponding to those affections, into whatever circumstances of birth and education their lot may have been cast. The Mohammedan, Hindoo, and African, who have been reared amid the darkness of Paganism, are as certainly responsible to God for possessing the essence of true religion, though not for the same enlightened form of it, as is the Christian.

The influence of right affections is extended to all the views and actions of the man. A right heart is the origin of a correct life, and a correct life the index of a right heart. Paine, in some of his writings, quotes with manifest exultation the sentiment of Pope, respecting modes of faith,

“His can't be wrong whose life is in the right.”

This, in a restricted and modified sense, is true. And in the same sense it is also true that

“His can't be right whose life is in the wrong.”

Consequently, if Paine himself was notorious for his licentious and abandoned habits, and if Rousseau exulted in the criminal life he led, it is on their own principles true, that they were both wrong, and that it was out of the abundance of a wicked heart, a heart at war with God and scorning the restraints of his holy law, that they wrote.

If a right heart is indispensable as a guide to truth, it is important to inquire how it may be ob-

tained. If it is a duty to love God supremely, it is a duty to choose him as the portion of the soul, and to seek him with all the heart. Let a man set out in earnest to repent, and whatever may have been his former sentiments, whether he receive the Bible as the word of God or not, he will fly to its sacred pages for direction. The more he studies it with prayer, the more full and clear will the evidences of the truth appear to him, till he will at length be led to renounce all his objections and excuses, and will by faith flee to the Saviour as his only refuge. Thousands who were once wandering in the darkness of infidelity, have thus been led into the path of wisdom and of peace. They have renounced with penitence their past errors, and have found the truth of the Bible to be accordant with their own Christian experience.

But the course of many pretended inquirers after the truth leaves on them the entire responsibility of their failure. They put the thought of God far away, and aim only to raise such a barrier against the truth as shall shield them from the fear of punishment. They neglect the Bible, and live without prayer. Their conduct evinces not the attitude of a religious inquirer, but of one who has taken ground against religion, and is determined to maintain it on the great field of infidelity. Rousseau lived in the habitual practice of gross and acknowledged sin, and destitute of any regard for God. So also did Paine. He even boasted of his

neglect of the sacred oracles. "I know not," he says on one occasion, "how the printers have pointed this passage, for I keep no Bible." And this neglect of the proper means to acquaint themselves with God, and of prayer, is characteristic of the course of skeptics generally. It is the evident desire of their hearts, as exhibited in the life, to live without God in the world. This is the secret of their infidelity, and of all their attempts to absolve themselves from their allegiance to Jehovah. They prefer to live without God ; and this preference, wherever it exists, leads directly into error as the most effectual means to shield themselves from danger, and to annihilate that source of unhappiness, the fear of punishment hereafter. It is most difficult to persuade the man in whom this wish to live without God exists, to choose him as his portion, and to seek him with all the heart. The motives and influences of truth and of the Holy Spirit sweep over him as the wind sweeps over a frozen lake. He blinds his eyes, hardens his heart, and presses on in his way till the curtain of life falls and he departs, a prayerless and lost sinner, to the dreadful retributions of eternity.

Do I address any who, yielding to this preference to live without God in the world, have tried to quiet their consciences in disobedience toward him by the infidel maxim we have now considered ? If it be true, why are you not a Christian ? You have been born amid the institutions of religion, have enjoyed

instruction in the truths of the Gospel ; and if religion be the creature of education, why is it that you are not converted ? Is it not evident, from your own experience, that this infidel maxim is false ? And what are all the sophistical reasonings, then, to prove the truth of a lie worth ?

When you set up an opinion as truth, which does not consist with supreme love to God, and a practical observance of duty toward him, you deliberately turn aside from him and embrace error, because you prefer to live without God in the world.

And are you not responsible for the results of this unfaithfulness to yourself and to society around you ? Assuredly you are. You cannot indulge a belief which tends to the destruction of that true religion, which consists in love to God and a practical obedience of his law, or inculcate these errors or others, without assuming responsibility the most fearful that man can assume. Who can estimate the enormity of the guilt incurred by one who, by the inculcation or belief of infidelity, attempts to weaken the claims of God's law on the human conscience, and to encourage that practical disobedience of it in the life, which is destructive of piety in the soul, and consigns it, unredeemed and unforgiven, to everlasting sorrow and despair ?

CHAPTER VI.

CONCERNING THE INFIDEL MAXIM, THAT THERE ARE SO MANY RELIGIONS AND RELIGIOUS OPINIONS IN THE WORLD, THAT WE CANNOT DECIDE ON THEIR RESPECTIVE CLAIMS.

It is characteristic of a large class of men, to be "ever learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth." These profess earnestly to desire the attainment of true religion; but such are the difficulties to be encountered in their search after the truth that they are often led to abandon it, and to rest in the difficulties of the case as presenting a real and substantial excuse for their neglect. The objection which they are ever ready to advance against the claims of religion is, that there are so many religions and religious opinions in the world, all professing to be true, that they cannot decide on their respective claims.

"The Persian," says Mr. Paine, "shows the Zendavesta of Zoroaster, the lawgiver of Persia, and calls it the divine law; the Bramin shows the Shaster, revealed, he says, by God to Brama, and given him out of a cloud; the Jew shows what he calls the law of Moses, given, he says, by God on Mount Si-

nai; the Christian shows a collection of books and epistles written by nobody knows who, and called the New Testament; and the Mohammedan shows the Koran, given, he says, by God to Mahomet; each of these calls itself revealed religion and the only true word of God; and this the followers of each profess to believe from the habit of education, and each believes the others are imposed upon." Again he says, "We see different parts of the world overspread with different books, each of which, though contradictory to each other, is said by its partisans to be of divine origin, and is made a rule of faith and practice."

One of Volney's main arguments against the religion of the Bible is, that all religions produce their prophets, their sacred books, their martyrs and their miracles; and who is to decide between their claims?

"Consider," says Rousseau, "in what a terrible discussion I am already engaged; what immense erudition I stand in need of to recur back to the earliest antiquity; to examine, to weigh, to confront prophecies, revelations, faith, with all the monuments of faith that have made their appearance in all countries of the world; to ascertain their time, place, authors, and occasions."

"Among so many religions, each of which proscribes and excludes the other, only one must be true, if, indeed, there be such a one among them all. Now to discover which this is, it is not enough

to examine that one ; it is necessary to examine them all, as we should not, on any occasion whatever, condemn without a hearing. What a fund of erudition will not this require ! How many languages must you learn ! How many libraries must you turn over ! And who is to direct you in the choice of books ?”

The impossibility of ever reaching a knowledge of the truth, is here urged from the number of religions existing in the world, and the evident impracticability of investigating them all. How are their conflicting claims to be suitably determined ? Rousseau contends that to do this, it is necessary to acquaint ourselves with all languages, travel abroad into every country, examine the historical records of every nation, delve into all the sciences, and after all, that we must die before the half of this immense labor can be performed,

In the concluding remarks of his treatise on Education, he states this objection in the strongest possible manner. “If there be in the world but one religion, and every man be obliged to adopt it under pain of damnation, it is necessary to spend our lives in the study of all religions, to visit the countries where they have been established, and examine and compare them with one another. No man is exempted from the principal duty of his species, and no one has a right to confide in the judgment of another. The artisan who lives only by his industry, the husbandman who cannot read, the timid and

delicate virgin, the feeble valetudinarian, all, without exception, must study, meditate, dispute, and travel the world over in search of truth. There would be no longer any settled inhabitants in a country, the face of the earth being covered by pilgrims going from place to place, at great trouble and expense, to verify, examine, and compare the different systems and modes of worship to be met with in various countries. We must, in such a case, bid adieu to the arts and sciences, to trade, and all the civil occupations of life. Every other study must give place to that of religion, while the man who should enjoy the greatest share of health and strength, and make the best use of his time and reason for the greatest term of years allotted to human life, would, in extreme old age, be still perplexed where to fix; and it would be a great thing, after all, if he should learn before his death what religion he ought to have believed and practiced during life."

Such is Rousseau's crowning argument given in his own words. Its absurdity is fitted to provoke a smile rather than to produce conviction. To such a length does he carry his objections to human testimony in matters of religion, as to give the appearance of caricature rather than of sober argument to his reasoning. The whole objection arises from a denial of the credibility of human testimony. His argument applied to the determination of cases occurring in the ordinary affairs of life,

would suggest a graphic picture of courts and juries traveling about, and even into foreign countries, to examine in detail all the facts on a given subject. We might argue the necessity of doing so on as good grounds as Rousseau argues in respect to the choice of a religion. We should then have courts of judicature traveling over the country, passing and repassing each other, crossing the ocean, and studying foreign languages to arrive at the truth of the statements made by witnesses who speak these languages, and to ascertain, as a matter of fact, whether John Doe killed Richard Roe on the high seas and was guilty of murder. And after all, the conclusion as to every transaction must rest upon testimony. The infidel argument is a caricature of the principle that no reliance is to be placed on human testimony in matters of religion; a principle in itself abundantly absurd, and contradictory to reason and common sense.

Has God thus left himself so entirely without a witness in the world? Must the human mind be ever tossed on an ocean of opinions, and be never able to gain a resting-place? Are we destined to be ever learning, and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth? No. The facts of religion are as fairly presented, and as capable of being understood and ascertained, as any other facts. Though there are many religious opinions in the world, yet the truth is open to all, and every man is bound to receive it, as he regards his eternal happiness.

The infidel maxim under consideration assumes that no religion is true and worthy of our confidence because there are so many religious opinions in the world, and so many systems of religion claiming to be genuine; and that, if there be a true religion, it may be lawfully rejected, because it is so difficult to determine, among so many, which is right. But it is very absurd to deny the claims of the Bible on such a ground. A principle of this nature applied to the common affairs of life would not be admitted for a moment. It is often difficult to settle questions of importance in respect to them, but men do not therefore neglect them. They apply themselves with greater diligence to decide them correctly.

Of all the subjects which command the attention of men, why should the infidel single out religion, and treat it so contrary to his method of treating other subjects? What should we think of one who should neglect the cultivation of his farm, for the reason, that there are so many opinions on the subject of agriculture, and so many treatises upon it, that he cannot decide which to follow; and who should abandon ploughing and sowing till some special revelation should make farming plain? Or of the man who should neglect his business, because there are so many opinions as to the best method of conducting it? That would not be unlike the conduct of one who should resolve, that because there is so much counterfeit money in the

world, he will take no money. If there be a true religion, we may pronounce it beforehand to be probable that there will also be religions which are false ; for things truly valuable are apt to be counterfeited. The existence of counterfeits, however, does not prove that there is no true coin. On the contrary, the counterfeit is a proof that such coin exists ; for why should men take pains to imitate that which is not genuine, and is worthless ? From the existence of spurious religions, it is a fair presumption that there is one which is true. And there is no more difficulty in ascertaining which this is, than there is respecting a thousand other points which in different ways involve the happiness of man. Let the difficulties be magnified to any extent, it will still be true, that the obligation rests upon man to give his utmost diligence to decide a question which affects his everlasting happiness.

But when it is said, that it is difficult to decide upon the respective claims of different religions, we are not to think that the infidel decides nothing on this subject. There are principles which he receives and maintains ; there is a belief to which he is devoted, and he shapes his actions accordingly. He decides that he will reject the religion of the Bible, and he does it on the principle that there are so many religious opinions in the world that he cannot judge any of them to be worthy of his confidence. That this is a groundless excuse for his er-

ror, will appear from a consideration of the manner in which religion should be investigated, and a consideration of the facts which present themselves to guide the mind in the examination.

A knowledge of true religion can be acquired only by a suitable attention to the subject. It is by attention only that the knowledge of anything useful to human happiness is attained. It involves no impeachment of the divine character that man should be required to exert his intellectual faculties in the investigation of truth, any more than that he should be compelled to labor in providing for himself the necessities of life. It is as reasonable that man should be required to exert his intellectual powers to secure his eternal happiness, as that he should cultivate the earth in order to reap its fruits; and it is not more inconsistent with the divine benevolence that there should be difficult points in religion, and things hard to be understood, than that there should be knotty points in science, or that there should be rocks on a farm; for it is a principle both in the world of nature and of grace, that the hand of the diligent maketh rich.

In religion as in everything else, we must use the light at hand to guide us into the knowledge of things dark and intricate. In attempting to master a science, it makes a great difference whether we begin with the elementary principles, or plunge into the midst of its demonstrations at once. A child who should begin at the higher rules of arith-

metic, would soon discover that it is impossible for him to comprehend them, without a previous acquaintance with the simple powers and combinations of numbers. Or should a person attempt to follow the demonstrations of Newton's *Principia* without having first become acquainted with the elements of geometry, he would find himself in inextricable difficulty. So the man who plunges into the sea of religious opinions without regard to the elementary principles of religion, must be confused and lost; or, like the man described by Rousseau, be ever learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.

There is a tendency in skeptical minds to begin the study of religion with things difficult, which it requires a practical training in elementary principles to comprehend; and because the difficulties are great in this mode of investigating truth, there is a disposition to cast the whole subject of religion aside. It is no fault in religion that to be understood it must be examined in its natural order, any more than it is a fault in science that it makes the same requisition. We might as well conclude that science and art are inconsistent with God's benevolence because they require proper investigation, as that the religion of the Bible is, for the same reason. In both there is a natural order to be pursued; and we may as correctly blame the Creator for not having endowed us with the intuitive knowledge of the arts and sciences, as that he has not communi-

ated to us in like manner the knowledge of himself.

It is a primary element of true religion, that there is one God, our Creator, who is endowed with infinite perfections, and is the preserver and governor of the world. Paine and Rousseau affirm with as much distinctness as does Paul in the Epistle to the Romans, that “the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.” They argue that the light of nature points to one who is to be worshiped as the Supreme God, and they regard every other religion but that which is founded on this view of the Deity, as abhorrent to the first principles of reason. Can they be in earnest, then, in speaking of other religions as having equal claims to our regard as has the Christian, and of men being compelled to travel over the earth to investigate their respective claims? If there be clear and abundant proof of the being of a God who is the creator of heaven and earth, can they not decide that all systems of idolatry, by whomsoever practiced, are false? The Zendavesta and Shaster, which they oppose to the Bible, the sacred books containing the religions of Persia, India, and China, are but systems of idolatry, whose falsehood is as easily detected at home as abroad. We need not travel over the earth and learn all languages to ascertain the evidence of this falsehood,

for it is apparent on the application of the elementary principle that there is one God, the creator and governor of the world; and the whole field of atheism and idolatry is swept clear of its diversified forms of religious error, by one intelligent view of the "shining heavens' well-ordered frame."

When Paine and Rousseau wrote on religion, the sacred books to which they so triumphantly allude were not so well known as they now are. Infidels in those days loved to magnify the stores of wisdom contained in those works, and to use them in depreciation of the Bible. But modern investigation has proved them to be a tissue of gross absurdities and of falsehoods, which sink them beneath our notice, and into merited contempt. And the only reason why they have been paraded so much in infidel writings, by the side of the Bible, is, because their contents were not then as well known as they are at the present time.

The elementary principles of true religion are common to all nations. God has given in his works such a witness of himself as to lay mankind under obligations to worship him. In respect to his being and perfections, the religion of the Bible is in exact accordance with that of nature, and infidels, even, must thus far admit them to be identical. There are none who may not derive the knowledge of God's existence and of his attributes from his works; and it requires but a small degree of attention to discover this to be the God of

the Bible ; for it is the first great principle of the Holy Scriptures that there is one only the living and true God, and that it is man's duty to worship him.

In its true acceptation, religion is an acknowledgment of the obligations which the creature owes to God, and the practice of the duties which flow from these obligations. But it is a term often used to express the religious manners and customs of men, instead of the obligations and duties of the creature toward his God.

Religion grows out of the relations of mankind to their Creator ; its obligations come into existence with these relations, as the obligations of a child to its parents are coeval with its birth. So soon as the relation exists, the obligation exists also. It is an obligation which depends on no revelation, and is grounded on the knowledge of no books. It exists in nature, independently of any consideration of the question as to how it is made known to man. We need not travel into foreign lands, nor study foreign languages, to learn that our Creator, with the right of a parent, requires our filial love and obedience. We need not follow in the train of those who shout the praises of Juggernaut, nor travel into Persia to consult the Zendavesta, nor into India to read the Shaster, nor into Turkey to study the Koran, nor to Jerusalem to examine the Mosaic law, to discover that God is our Creator, and that it is our duty to worship

him ; for both the child and the savage may from the light of nature, and from the law written on the heart, know this, and that atheism and idolatry are a lie.

The great facts which relate to man as a religious being are facts common to every one's observation ; and though comparatively little is known of God, yet it is sufficient to lay us under obligation supremely to love him. Every man may also discover from the light of nature his own sinfulness, and that he does not conform himself to the rules of duty which he himself acknowledges to be right.

But natural religion presents to view no provision for the recovery of man from the guilt and misery consequent on sin, and it provides no appropriate answer to the inquiry, how the rebellious creature of God may be restored to his favor. This is the appropriate office of the Gospel.

The law of God revealed in the Bible is not obligatory on man on this account only ; for it had an existence previous to its revelation. It originated in the relations of the creature to his God, and was as obligatory before its revelation on Sinai as it was after. The Bible does not create religion ; it only reveals its obligations and duties more clearly than the light of nature, and presents motives more distinctly to enforce its claims ; while the Gospel makes known to man the means of his restoration to the divine favor, and claims

to have been revealed for this very purpose. The whole object of the Gospel is to recover mankind from the ruin of the apostasy, and to lead them back to the observance of their duties to God. It is a system of grace adapted to meet and remove those difficulties of natural religion which are otherwise insuperable. It brings out those things which are faintly shadowed forth in the works of nature in clear and palpable certainty. Its testimonies to the being of God, to the nature of his law, and the facts of human depravity, fully accord with the light of nature and with the testimony of reason and experience. While it points out the way of the sinner's return to God through repentance, and the remission of his sins in Christ, it brings the motives of the Cross to bear on the heart, to awaken it to repentance, and to lead it back from the dominion of sin to a holy obedience. Its power thus to change the affections, and to recover the rebellious sinner to God, is attested by innumerable witnesses, who have themselves experienced the Gospel's converting influences, and who give evidence in their lives of its divine nature.

When we speak of the religion of the Gospel, we allude to none of the minor points which have separated evangelical Christians into different denominations, for these are comparatively of no importance; but we speak of that true religion of the heart which the Gospel inculcates, and which involves that faith in Christ which justifies the

soul, and is associated with a life of holy obedience. This, wherever it exists, is true religion. It may be connected with different views on points which are unessential to salvation, and thus branch out into denominational differences; but the existence of these differences in those who adhere to faith in Christ for justification, is of no more vital importance than the shape and color of the different edifices in which Christians worship. They do not represent different religions, but one diamond differently set; one religion clad in different vestments, but yet the same, performing the same vital functions, and doing the same great work. The whole influence of the Gospel is directed to inculcate true religion of the heart; and on this vital point all evangelical Christians agree. All build on one rock, and that is Christ; and he who, through converting grace, rests on this foundation, will not fail of heaven at last, in whatever Christian association he may be found. So that the infidel's argument, as to the external diversities of Christians, avails nothing.

The religion of the Gospel, as it affects the creature's relations to God, is distinct from the airy castles which sectarian pride has built up, and which will be discovered at last to be but hay, wood, and stubble. The arguments and motives of the Gospel, the morality it inculcates, and the duties which it enjoins, are the palpable means of bringing sinners to repentance, and the prayerless

and wicked to love and obey God. All who come under its sanctifying influences are redeemed and saved. Where, but under the Gospel, do we discover those who give to the world evidence that they love God? Do we find them in the haunts of infidelity, or in the Christian sanctuary? In the paths of sin, or in the house of prayer? When men come by converting grace under the full influences of the Gospel, are they seduced from their allegiance to God, whose glories are proclaimed in the world of nature and written on the sky; or do they become more attached to him than before, speak of him more reverently, and obey his laws with more solicitude? Do they become the superstitious patrons of imposture, or the true friends of virtue? Are they ignorant, self-willed, and vicious; or intelligent, humble, and pious? Are they absorbed in their own selfish plans; or, as the children of the Most High, do they imitate his excellencies, and aim to win over to his allegiance, and to guide in the path of happiness, all whom they can?

Where, amid the claims of idolatry and of Mohammedanism, do we discover a religion which so exactly accords with the religion of nature as does that of the Bible; or which aims to sustain the first principles of religion, love and obedience to God, as does that revealed in the sacred oracles? The Gospel teaches no new religion; it only illustrates that of nature; and at the same time it pro-

vides for those difficulties which natural religion does not contemplate and cannot reach, and which result from the apostasy of the race from God. It shows how a revolted world may be restored to its allegiance, and the ground of this restoration, and its great object will be gained whenever it shall have brought mankind to know and acknowledge their Creator, and to love and practice the duties which he requires.

But where can we discover these great ends contemplated by any of the other systems of religion which hold a place in the superstitious feelings of mankind? What mighty powers of investigation does it require to detect the imposture of their pretensions, and to sweep them away? Need we go to India to learn the falsehood of idolatry; or into the different countries of the earth, to discover the superstitions which hold their millions in abject ignorance, and encourage them to cast off the God of nature, and to live in habitual violation of his laws? Assuredly not. For it is evident on its very face, that whatever tends to lead the mind away from God, and encourages men to sin against him, is delusive and false.

So obvious are the marks of true religion, and so clearly is it discoverable that this is the religion of the Bible, as to lay on every man the obligation to decide that it is so.

There is no man who honestly follows the leadings of truth who will not make the discovery of

his own sinfulness. The necessity of repentance, and of the redemption purchased by Christ, follows with unavoidable inference. So that, if men in their natural state would obey the first principles of their duty, they would be led to God in true repentance, and would make the discovery that the religion of the Bible is but the religion of nature, and is just what they must individually possess to be happy under the divine government.

The ignorance of mankind on this subject is voluntary. They will not acquaint themselves with the facts which are obvious, nor practice the simplest duties of religion, as the means of reaching the knowledge of those which are more intricate. Thousands who deny the Bible, have never read it. Averse to its divine author, and unwilling to assume the obligations which it imposes, it is not possible for them, while governed by such prejudices, to obtain any satisfactory views of its truth. The nearer they approach God, the less satisfied do they become with themselves. They know that if God is such a being as he is they are lost, if his enemies; and they therefore aim to sweep away all those views of God, and of their duty, which involve the necessity of their repentance.

Those who oppose the religion of the Bible, do not enter on the investigation of truth with right feelings, or conduct it on correct principles. They aim to oppose and pull down, rather than build up. And this they do, because unwilling to come under

the law of God, or to yield him that love and obedience which he demands.

It is not to be wondered at, that to such minds the religion of the Bible is incomprehensible. But he who truly seeks after God, and who uses the light which he has received and improves the facilities which are offered, may come to a true knowledge of him, and a cordial belief in the testimonies of his word. Yea, even the little child and the valetudinarian, whom Rousseau pompously parades as traveling over the world, and studying the languages of the earth to discover truth, by entering into their closet and there communing with God, repenting of their sins and turning unto him with their whole heart, may learn more of his character and of the nature of true religion than they could acquire during a lifetime spent in studying its speculative truth.

There is a natural order to be pursued in the acquisition of religious knowledge, and of science, which it is indispensable to pursue. There are elementary principles which must not be disregarded; and the first of these principles as it respects religion is, that God is to be acknowledged and our duty to him observed so far as understood. Nor is the direction of the Apostle to be overlooked, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." No man can honestly pursue this natural order of investigating truth, and

sincerely come to God in prayer for guidance, and not be led aright.

But he who walks in the light of his own understanding, who proudly repels Jehovah's law, who aims by the mere force of his own intellect to penetrate the dark things of God, and never seeks him by prayer, will certainly fail to acquire the truth; the multitude of religious opinions which surround him will bewilder his mind, and like the man wandering among the tombs, bereft of eyesight, so will he continue to wander, "ever learning, but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth," till he shall fall to rise no more.

It is not because of the numerous religious opinions which are prevalent in the world; nor because there is not sufficient evidence that the Bible is true; nor is it because of any real difficulty in deciding on the respective claims of truth and error, that infidels fail of acquiring a knowledge of the truth; but it is because they are unwilling to put themselves under the guidance of truth and to obey its dictates in respect to that in which their duty is clear; and not being willing to receive the truth and to obey it in respect to things which are obvious, they wander in error, loving darkness rather than the light, because their deeds are evil. All the appeals of truth to them are made to minds which are steeled by the bias of sinful affections against its proper impressions. They are not willing to come under the responsibilities and con-

straints of the religion of the Bible, and they therefore adopt any opinions and cherish any belief which may remove from them these responsibilities.

It is hard for the man who prefers to live without God in the world, to admit that his law is extended over him, that as a sinner he is condemned by it, and that he must repent or perish. It is hard to bring the powers and faculties of his soul into subjection to the will of his Creator. The natural heart revolts at it, and turns away in disgust from that religion which demands it. All its affections are opposed to the supremacy of Jehovah, and hard it is to adopt a religion which requires the acknowledgment of this as its first great principle, and brings all the powers and faculties of the mind under its control. And yet the evidences that this is the true religion are very manifest. No man who gives the subject any attention can doubt it; or if doubts exist, they would all be dispersed the moment that he should begin to seek after God with all his heart.

The first great duty of life is to love God supremely, and to obey the duties which this love involves. It is not possible that one should be enlightened into things which are dark, when he purposely rejects the guidance of truth into things which are plain and easy. If God require the supreme affections of the heart, and man will not yield them to him, nor seek him by prayer, he must bear the responsibility of his own ignorance, and

meet the great principle of truth and duty which he tramples under foot, at the judgment-seat of Christ. He may excuse himself from duty and reject the religion of the Bible on account of the difficulties which encumber it; but for this rejection he must give account at last to him who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing.

The first step in the acquisition of truth is to possess one's self of right affections toward God, and to obey him in all the duty which he requires. No sooner is the heart right than all the difficulties which existed respecting his law and government are at an end. He who once opposed the truth because it is condemnatory of his wicked life, will love the very truth which he despised. His affections fixed on God, will no longer oppose any obstacle to the reception of his law as the guide of his actions. His opinions, and the judgments of his mind, will all be on the side of truth, and he will love that which God loves. Thus the light will shine into his mind, and truth in all its brightness will be revealed.

But you profess that there are so many religions in the world, that you cannot make up your mind to embrace any one of them, nor to decide on their respective claims. Be it so. But how will you answer it to your Creator, that you have not loved him as God, since this is a duty of natural religion even, which you cannot deny? If you have been disturbed by the pretensions of men, why have you

not admitted the claims of the great Jehovah on your love and service? Why have you not come to him in the spirit of repentance for all your sins, and seeking with the deepest earnestness his face? What excuse can you offer for treating God as you have hitherto done, with habitual neglect?

If there are difficulties in deciding as to the truth or falsehood of the different opinions existing in the world, there is no difficulty in determining that you are bound to love God supremely, and to fulfill the duties which this obligation imposes. Turn not, then, away from this glorious being in the spirit of those who say, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways;" but let it be the language of your purpose, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek;" for the humble and obedient shall be gladdened at the discovery of his excellence, and he will lead them into the green pastures and by the still waters of the everlasting rest.

CHAPTER VII.

CONCERNING THE SKEPTICAL MAXIM, THAT RELIGION IS UNWORTHY OF CREDIT, BECAUSE ITS CREDIBILITY DEPENDS ON HUMAN TESTIMONY; AND BECAUSE, IF IT HAD COME FROM GOD, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED IN A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE.

THE air of confidence with which infidels declaim on the ignorance and prejudice of those who profess the religion of the Bible, and on the difficulties and inconsistencies of that religion, is fitted to have a pernicious influence on the inexperienced and the young. Under the guise of truth, the worst sentiments are advanced; or they are so mingled with the truth as to conceal their falsehood. Their poison is thus secretly insinuated. The truth is forgotten, the error only remains; and the ignorant and unwary are stealthily brought under the influence of infidel sentiments without a suspicion of their false and pernicious tendency.

There is far less of sound learning or of correct reasoning in the works of skeptical men than is generally thought. Their writings are composed chiefly for popular effect; and what they cannot accomplish by argument they attempt to effect by

ridicule. Their appeals are chiefly to the prejudices of men. In arguing against the religion of the Bible, they are sensible that they have the feelings of the depraved heart with them. This heart is enmity against God, and naturally sympathizes with the efforts of skeptical men to extinguish the light of true religion. All who prefer to live without God, are in feeling already on the side of the infidel, and are withheld from going over to that side altogether only by the latent conviction of its error, or the fear lest the religion of the Bible, which they are anxious to discard, should prove true at last. Hence it is a prime effort with infidel writers to break down such conscientious scruples, and to dispel such fears. In doing this, resort is had not to argument, so much as to ridicule. No one can examine the works of Voltaire and Paine without being struck with the profaneness and scurrility of their pages. It is not by the force of sound argument that they expect to carry the defences of religion, so much as by brutalizing the moral sensibilities and annihilating the force of conscience. And when the moral susceptibilities of the soul are thus blunted, it becomes as difficult to sharpen them again as to restore feelings of delicacy to a mind which has long been contaminated with the pollutions of sin.

The secret source of the influence of infidel writings lies in the preference of man to live without God ; and this preference, wherever it exists,

leads one to listen with a willing ear to everything which is advanced against the religion of the Bible, and to close the avenues of the mind to the soundest arguments in its defence. It is only by tearing away the breastwork of infidelity, and exposing it in its true imbecility and falsehood, that we can hope to do good in this inquiry into its principles.

It is a common objection to the religion of the Bible, in the writings of skeptical men, that it is unworthy of credit because its claims to our regard are based on human testimony, and that this testimony has been promulgated to a limited extent, and millions of our race have been left to die in profound ignorance of its truths. If the Gospel is from God, it is said, why is it not communicated in a universal language, published by a voice from heaven, and sustained by miracles wrought in the sight of every individual?

Says Mr. Paine, in his *Age of Reason*, "Revelation, when applied to religion, means something communicated immediately from God to man. No one will deny or dispute the power of the Almighty to make such a communication if he pleases. But admitting, for the sake of a case, that something has been revealed to a certain person, and not revealed to any other person, it is revelation to that person only. When he tells it to a second person, a second to a third, a third to a fourth, and so on, it ceases to be a revelation to all these persons."

Says the same author, "The idea or belief of a

word of God existing in print, or in writing, or in speech, is inconsistent in itself, for reasons already assigned. These reasons, among many others, are the want of an universal language; the mutability of language; the errors to which translations are subject; the possibility of totally suppressing such a word; the probability of altering it, or of fabricating the whole and imposing it on the world."

Again says Mr. Paine, "You may have an opinion that a man is inspired, but you cannot prove it; nor can you have any proof of it yourself, because you cannot see into his mind in order to know how he comes by his thoughts; and the same is the case with the word *revelation*. There can be no evidence of such a thing, for you can no more prove revelation than you can prove what another man dreams of, neither can he prove it himself."

"Suppose," says Rousseau, "that the Divine Majesty had really condescended to make man the organ of promulgating its sacred will, is it reasonable, is it just, to require all mankind to obey the voice of such a minister without his making himself known to be such? Where is the equity or propriety in furnishing him for universal credentials with only a few particular tokens displayed before a handful of obscure persons, and of which the rest of mankind know nothing but by hearsay?"

Again says the same author, "What, then, can even the Apostle of truth have to tell me of which I am not still to judge? *But God himself hath*

spoken ; listen to the voice of revelation. God hath spoken ! This is saying a great deal ; but to whom hath he spoken ? *He hath spoken to man.* How comes it that I heard nothing of it ? *He hath appointed others to teach you his word.* I understand you ; there are certain men who are to tell me what God hath said. I had much rather have heard it from himself. This, had he so pleased, he could easily have done, and I should then have run no risk of deception. Will it be said, that I am secured from that by his manifesting the mission of his messengers by miracles ? Where are those miracles to be seen ? Are they related only in the books ? Pray, who wrote those books ? Men. Who were the witnesses to those miracles ? Men. Always human testimony ! It is always men who tell me what other men have told them. What a number of these are constantly between me and the Deity ! We are always reduced to the necessity of examining, comparing, and verifying such evidence. O that God had deigned to have saved me all this trouble ! Should I have served him with a less willing heart ?”

These objections are advanced to undermine the credit of all human testimony, for the sake of reaching that by which the Gospel is sustained. The ground is here distinctly assumed that testimony cannot establish the fact that God has inspired men to teach the Gospel, nor substantiate the claims of the Gospel as thus taught to being the word of

God; and the main reason why it cannot is, that it is human testimony, and therefore liable to suspicion of imposture. Infidels are unwilling to allow that weight to the evidences of Christianity which they give to other evidence, and to avoid their force, they have endeavored to invalidate this testimony.

Mr. Hume flatters himself that he has struck a fatal blow at all testimony adduced in support of miracles, and his argument, he thinks, will prove an everlasting check to all kind of superstitious delusions; and, consequently, will be useful so long as the world shall endure. He lays it down as an undoubted truth, "That experience is our only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact, and that a uniform experience, having established the laws of nature, there is a uniform experience against the existence of any miracle. But a uniform experience amounts to a full and entire proof. To suppose, therefore, any testimony to be a proof of a miracle, is to suppose one full proof for a miracle, opposed to another full proof in the nature of things against it; in which case those proofs destroy one another; and we are not to believe any testimony concerning a miracle, except the falsehood of that testimony should be more miraculous than the miracle itself, which it is designed to establish."

The fallacy of this reasoning will be evident to one who attempts to fix in his mind what it is that he means by experience. A uniform experience,

he says, is against the existence of any miracle. Experience, as here used, is knowledge derived from observation, and it may be the knowledge which an individual has himself acquired, or that of others communicated to him by testimony. When Mr. Hume speaks of a uniform experience, he evidently designs to include that of all ages and nations of which we have any knowledge. A uniform experience, he says, is against the existence of any miracle. Mr. Hume's experience may be of this kind, and yet the experience of Moses, Peter, John, and the Apostles of Christ, may be of a different character. It is the experience of the Hindoo that water cannot exist in a solid state ; but it accords with our experience that it may. The experience of Mr. Hume and others, his contemporaries, cannot prove that miracles did not occur in the time of Christ, because the experience of men at these two periods may have been widely different. How are we to know what the experience of the past is on this subject, excepting from testimony ; and if resort be had to testimony, the point is settled beyond dispute, that there has not always been a uniform experience against miracles. Mr. Hume's experience proves nothing against miracles, because of the change which has occurred in the circumstances of the case, the occasion for the exercise of this power having long since passed away. It remains only for testimony to show

whether an opposite state of things did not once exist, and which called for the divine interposition, through signs acknowledged to proceed from God only, to make himself known to man as the author of communications designed to affect his happiness. What Mr. Hume experienced was a matter of pure consciousness, or of his own observation ; what thousands experienced in the days of Christ, it is for testimony only to show. So that this argument from experience resolves itself simply into a balancing of testimonies, in which a negative experience is set up against positive testimony of the most substantial character.

The value of this kind of reasoning you readily perceive. If a hundred men should be brought forward to testify to their own experience, or knowledge by observation of the transmission of intelligence through the electric telegraph, they might all attest that they knew nothing of it, and yet their negative testimony would avail nothing against the positive testimony of two credible witnesses who had been present and seen it done. Whole nations, and continents even, might give in their experience on this subject, as never having seen such a wonderful occurrence ; and yet the positive testimony of a few men of unblemished character would be of more value than any array of such evidence ; for there are nations which this modern invention has not yet reached. But their want of experience in

such circumstances cannot overthrow the testimony of those who have been present and seen that which they describe.

Can there be testimony competent to establish the existence of a miracle in any case? According to Mr. Hume's argument, there cannot. For if human testimony is liable to suspicions of imposture, so are the senses liable to deceive us, or we rather to be deceived by wrong inferences drawn from the things we see and hear. Are men to believe the evidence of their senses? According to Mr. Hume, they are not, when this evidence tends to establish a miracle. But how are we to have any experience of what transpires in the world, excepting it is gained through the senses? And if the senses deceive us, how can we know what the uniform experience of the course of nature is? The senses are the inlets of all our knowledge from without, and if these fail to convey just impressions to the mind, then are we indeed afloat on the ocean of skepticism. If the senses fail, then all testimony fails at once, and men ought never again to be tried and condemned in our civil courts for their conduct.

But it accords with the uniform experience of mankind that the senses do not usually deceive. If a man have seen a thing done, and if a competent number of credible witnesses, and uncontradicted, of suitable information and with proper opportunities to observe, testify to that transaction

as having occurred under their own immediate observation, it is an end of all controversy. The case is settled beyond a doubt, whatever may be the consequences it involves. This is the common-sense view of the case. If a man, in a fit of anger, strike another with a club and kill him on the spot in the presence of credible witnesses, their testimony is sufficient to establish the fact of the homicide, and to consign the offender to the punishment of the law. The inferences which men sometimes draw from the report of their senses are erroneous; but the senses themselves, in a healthy state, never fail to convey a true impression to the mind.

This principle, which is universally admitted, is the foundation of all human testimony. That men are to believe the evidence of their senses is accordant with truth, and is the first principle of human knowledge; and he who should assert and attempt to prove the opposite assumption, would only demonstrate to the world that he is a fit subject for the lunatic asylum.

And if men are to believe the evidence of their senses, it is competent, through the senses, to establish the existence of a miracle. The appeal is to the senses, whenever God interposes, by a sign from heaven, to communicate with men, and to convince them that it is his message. Miracles are operations of divine power, independent of the course of nature, addressed to men through the

senses for their conviction. The senses give us all the knowledge we possess of the uniformity of the course of nature, and of the divine interposition to change this course at any time, for the conviction of mankind. Their evidence is to be received. And if their evidence is to be received, then it is competent, through the senses, to gain conclusive proof of the existence of a miracle.

There is no greater difficulty as to the credibility of witnesses. Mr. Hume rejects all testimony as unworthy of credit because some men are false, and confounds a man of integrity with a liar. He forgets that there is a kind of testimony which is liable to no suspicions of imposture, and which may prove an event to have occurred with entire certainty. The miracle would in fact be greater if some things established by human testimony should prove false, than the occurrence of all the miracles related by the sacred historians. That there is such a nation as England, and that there are such cities as London and Paris, are facts known to the great mass of mankind only through human testimony. That this testimony should prove false, and that we should have lived all our days in the belief of these facts, when after all they are untrue, would be a greater miracle than any recorded in the Bible. There is human testimony, then, which is competent to establish truth, testimony which is as worthy of belief as is the proof of our own existence; and which is competent,

therefore, to establish the occurrence of a miracle. So obvious is this, that we cannot help wondering how the philosophic mind of Mr. Hume could, for an instant, tolerate the absurdities which are involved in his argument. The fact is susceptible of explanation only from the known bias of the depraved heart against the truth, against God, and the demands of his righteous law.

The fact that miracles have been wrought in confirmation of the fact that God has communicated his will to man as the guide of his actions, is substantiated by human testimony. Jesus Christ and his Apostles wrought miracles in confirmation of their peculiar claims; and this fact is attested to us in ways which leave no room for doubt and uncertainty. But this testimony does not come to us in the form that infidels love to represent that it does, that one has told another what his father told him, and thus extending back for eighteen centuries. Not only have we the original communications of inspired men reduced to a written form, but innumerable evidences that these writings are of divine origin. The recorded testimonies, could they be spread out in one view, would form a mass of evidence more convincing than is that which exists of any other fact which has transpired since the creation of the world. By the decisions of our courts of justice, estates are transferred from one claimant to another, and men are deprived of their personal liberty, and even of

life, on not a tithe of the evidence which proves the truth and inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, and flows through the channel of human testimony alone.

But this testimony is not unsupported. We have in our possession the volume, and have the means of judging of its character. This volume contains predictions of events which the omniscient eye of God only could have foreseen. The rise and succession of empires and their fall, the political changes of the world, the particular dispensations of the divine providence respecting distinct races of people, the rise of the Mohammedan and Roman powers and their declension, and the establishment and extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, are some of the subjects of these prophecies. Many of them, particularly those referring to the Jews, Egyptians, the Mohammedan and Roman powers, and the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, are receiving their fulfillment before our eyes. Several thousands of years before these events have transpired, have they been distinctly foretold. Can any miracle be more convincing? We do not need to see the sick healed, and the dead raised to life again, to give us assurance that God is speaking to men by his holy word. The evidence is now as conclusive to those who study the sacred oracles, as if every man heard God speaking from his throne, and should receive clear attestation of the fact that it is God who thus speaks.

Besides, the Bible bears internal evidence of its divine origin. It contains allusions which a superior knowledge of the manners and customs of the age in which it was composed would enable us more perfectly to understand ; but its general scope, and all that is important for us to know, is so plain that we need not mistake. The great fact of man's apostasy and ruin in connection with the doctrines of repentance, justification, and forgiveness, is set forth in language too plain to be misunderstood. There are no other writings which for the amount of valuable truth they communicate, and for their influence on the welfare and happiness of man, bear a comparison with these. No legislative authority has ever yet been able to discover one duty, or prohibit one sin, which is not exhibited as a duty or sin in the sacred Scriptures. All the merit of those who profess to have drawn their system of morality from nature, has consisted in principles resembling those exhibited in the Bible. Volney, in his Catechism on the law of nature, has drawn out to view many of the very principles of the law of God revealed by Moses on Sinai ; and no one can institute a comparison between them, and not be satisfied that these systems of morality are substantially identical, and that Volney was himself indebted, either directly or indirectly, to the sacred Scriptures for all that is equitable and just in his system.

Added to this is the testimony of those who have

themselves experienced the religion of Jesus Christ, and who thus know what a new heart is, and what it is to be saved through faith in him. We may call up in any Christian congregation many whose testimony on other subjects would be implicitly received, who, when separately examined, will give the same descriptions of their own experience, and of the power and influence of that religion which they have professed.

But this, says the infidel, is the testimony of men, and what do we know about it? We reply, that to confide in human testimony in respect to anything which affects our happiness, accords with the soundest principles of reason and common sense. Society could not exist, and everything valuable in life would be destroyed, if all confidence of man in man is to be withholden. Let a man start in life on the principle that he will not receive human testimony, and what would become of him? He must cast aside geography as unworthy of his notice, because it is formed out of human testimony, the testimony of men who have explored the face of the earth. He must repudiate all history, for the same reasons. The arts and sciences must have the same fate. All deeds and evidences of real estate must be abandoned as worthless. He must believe nothing that he reads, and nothing that is told him by others; nor must he, in turn, expect to be believed, even under the solemn assurance of an oath. In such circumstances, happiness would

be impossible, even if with such principles it were possible for society to exist.

Due reception and credence of human testimony are indispensable to social happiness. And if facts which involve our temporal happiness are deemed to be substantiated by it as worthy of our confidence, why should the like confidence be withheld from similar evidences of those facts which involve our eternal welfare? Is it any ground for the impeachment of Jehovah's wisdom and goodness to suppose that he has made our eternal happiness dependent on human testimony, any more than it is that the happiness of this life is dependent on such testimony?

To examine all the evidences to the truth and inspiration of the Bible, requires time and patience. So does it, to derive from any department of industry the benefit which it can confer. The moral world bears an analogy in this respect to the world of nature. A man must sow and reap, before he can eat the produce of his field; he must also study to know God, and to obey him, before he can enjoy the happiness of a holy obedience.

But why, it is again asked, HAS THE GOSPEL BEEN COMMUNICATED TO THE FEW, AND WITHHELD FROM THE MANY? If it be a revelation from God, why has it not been published in a universal language, promulgated by a voice from heaven, and sustained by miracles addressed to the conviction of every member of the human family? Says Rousseau, "Either

all religions are good and agreeable to God ; or if there be one which he dictated to man and will punish him for rejecting, he hath certainly distinguished it by manifest signs and tokens, as the only true one. These signs are common to all times and places, and are equally obvious to all mankind, to the young and to the old, the learned and ignorant, to Europeans and Indians, Africans and savages. If there be only one religion in the world that can prevent our suffering eternal damnation, and there be in any part of the earth a single mortal who is sincere and is not convinced by its evidence, the God of that religion must be the most iniquitous and cruel of tyrants." Again : "Is there but a single individual in the universe to whom the Gospel of Christ is not made known ; the objection which presents itself on account of this one person is as cogent as if it included a fourth part of the human family."

Mr. Paine, in his Essay on Religion, says, "We have no cause or ground for anything we behold in these works to suppose God would deal partially by mankind, and reveal knowledge to one nation and withhold it from another, and then damn them for not knowing it. The sun shines an equal quantity of light all over the world, and mankind, in all ages, are endowed with reason, and blessed with sight, to render visible the works of God in the creation, and so intelligent is this book, that *he who runs may read.*"

These objections assume that there is a want of evidence as to the nature of those obligations which rest on man in relation to his Creator, and that it is for the want of this evidence that, according to the Gospel, the innocent are condemned and punished; and this is represented as a sentiment necessarily associated with the religion of Jesus Christ. But this is by no means true. The Jews had incontrovertible evidence of the divinity of Christ, but were not convinced by it. And there is evidence of religious truth now within the compass of every man's observation which fails of producing conviction in consequence of the prejudice existing in the natural heart against the truth. Signs from heaven, and a voice issuing from the sky, might overpower the human faculties without leading them a single step in the path of conviction. Conviction depends not so much on the amount of evidence existing in a given case, as on a disposition to receive this evidence; and such is the natural depravity of the heart, so complete the domination of the sinful passions, as to lead men, against the light of reason and experience, in a course of folly tending only to destruction. Men continue to press on in the path of ruin, although convinced of their error. The conviction of the understanding may be perfect, and yet the perverse heart impels them to persevere. It is not for the want of evidence, but of a disposition to act according to its light, that men pursue their sinful courses,

and choose the path of error in preference to that of truth.

Neither is it the defect of evidence to the truth and inspiration of the Gospel, which leads men to reject it, but the want of right affections toward God ; for in the cordial reception of the Gospel, the heart must be persuaded as well as the understanding convinced. On this account, God selected men, and not angels, as the heralds of the Gospel, and preferred the voice of the living preacher to speaking perpetually by miraculous organs, as the means to advance most successfully the cause of true religion. Men who, by their experience, know the power of depravity and the sanctifying influence of reclaiming grace, are, in the view of Jehovah, the fittest instruments to publish the news of salvation to their fellow-men.

Besides, this mode of communicating the Gospel to mankind can be shown to be the better way, inasmuch as it tends to give intenseness to the sense of human responsibility, and to subserve the ends of discipline and moral training. It promotes in the highest degree the welfare and happiness of those who love God, wakens in them right affections toward each other, and toward those whom they are called to bless with the Gospel, and thus fits the church on earth by the best of discipline for a glorious immortality in heaven.

But what would voices issuing from the sky, and miracles performed in the sight of all men, do to-

ward the conversion of the world, when these miracles failed to convert the unbelieving Jews? The infidel forgets, in his zeal to decry religion, that the most powerful and convincing evidence will avail nothing on moral subjects if the heart be not touched. The heart must be persuaded and won over to the obedience of the Gospel, or nothing is gained. And God has selected the wisest plan to accomplish this great result, when he committed the Gospel to his church, commanded them to promulgate it, and provided for accompanying it with the influences of his Holy Spirit.

But in this mode of communicating the Gospel, many are, at times, excluded from its privileges; and will a just God condemn them for such exclusion? Certainly not. None of the human family will be condemned and punished for their ignorance, any further than they are themselves worthy of blame for it. But many to whom the Gospel has been sent have rejected it. Mankind generally have shut themselves out from its light in consequence of their aversion to its holy precepts. They have loved darkness rather than light, because they have loved the works of darkness in preference to those of light. Controlled in their volitions by a love for the pleasures of the world, they have turned away from the light of nature, which would have introduced them to that of the Gospel, unwilling to read the record which God has made of himself, written in the sky, and borne to the re-

most pagan nation by those shining orbs which proclaim his glory. They will not conform their actions to what they themselves know and acknowledge to be right, and are therefore condemned, independently of revelation, for the manner in which they treat the light of nature and the law of God written on the heart.

When the infidel reasons on this subject, he makes the religion of the Gospel distinct from that of nature. Whereas they are identical. He represents the religion of the Bible as a tissue of absurd dogmas, which are contrary to nature, and are sustained only by miraculous signs surpassing human credulity. But it is not the religion of the Bible which he thus caricatures. This religion is exactly the same as that inculcated by nature. The sum of its requisitions is supreme love to God, and love to our neighbor, which are the fundamental principles of all natural religion.

In addition to this, the Gospel is substantially a remedial system, which is designed for the recovery of the whole apostate race. It communicates the great facts involved in redemption, and their connection with the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life; and it proffers to all men the benefits of the Saviour's atoning sacrifice, on their repentance and reception of him by faith as a Saviour.

Here let it be observed, that the provision of the Gospel for the recovery of "ruined man is one thing, and the knowledge of this provision another.

Independently of this provision, no man can be saved ; but that no man can be saved without a definite knowledge of this provision, is not so evident. In offering himself up as a propitiatory sacrifice on the cross, Christ had respect to the race as sinful and lost. Hence it is recorded, that “ He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world ;” and “ the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” His propitiatory offering laid a foundation in the moral government of God, for the free forgiveness of all who repent of their sins and turn unto him believing in his name. On the ground of this provision, sinners of every age and nation may receive the remission of their sins and a restoration to the holy joys of Paradise. Why may not a heathen, if he should repent and turn to God, even though ignorant of Christ, be saved for his sake ?

It was characteristic of Abraham’s faith that he believed God. The faith of the ancient patriarchs and prophets was reposed in God, but their knowledge of a Saviour involved little more than a confidence that God would make provision for the forgiveness of sins through a Saviour to come ; and the direction of the Holy Scripture of the Old Testament was, “ Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him turn unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and unto our God, and he will abundantly pardon.”

Cornelius the centurion was accepted of God before he heard Christ preached. And why may not the heathen turn to God in true repentance, believing in his name, and thus derive salvation from the provisions of mercy set forth in the Gospel, though they never heard of Christ? No man can show that they may not, and that the light of nature is not sufficient, if they were disposed to be guided by it, to lead them to true repentance and salvation.

What, then, becomes of the infidel surmise, that the heathen are condemned for not knowing the facts which transpired at Jerusalem eighteen centuries ago? It is a mere surmise, a man of straw raised up, to be exultingly knocked down again; as if the Christian religion were that man of straw, and the infidel himself the champion of truth and virtue to prostrate it in the dust.

The fact is, the heathen is condemned because he is a wicked man, and will not conform his heart and life to that duty which he knows and acknowledges, but will not obey; and the Gospel is published to us not because there is no light in nature, and no obligation resulting from this light, but as an act of grace, to impress our hearts with the divine goodness, and lead us to repentance. It is the most efficient means of turning the heart of the sinner unto God, and the use of it is therefore required, in addition to the influences proceeding from the light of nature. It is a merciful gift imparted for the benefit of man, a gift which no man

can claim as a right, or justly blame God for withholding.

But why, it is again asked, does God bestow his mercies so unequally? To this it may be replied, that having adopted the best plan of communicating it through human agency, he is not responsible for the slothfulness and negligence of those to whom he has entrusted it. Does the infidel find fault with the unequal distribution of God's mercies in this respect? We ask him, if this is not accordant with his conduct in other respects? Why does he permit one to come into the world and to grow up beautiful in person and gifted with superior intellect, and another to be born blind, lame, and deaf, or devoid of natural understanding? Why confer wealth on one, and on another cast poverty? Why train one up under the best influences of religion, and another under the worst influences of depravity? These are difficulties not peculiar to the religion of the Bible, and which the Deist is as much bound to solve as is the Christian. When we reason on the moral justice of God, we must treat it on principles which commend themselves to every conscience as right; but when we treat of his mercies, we can only leave the dispensation of them in his hand, and say, "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight."

The Gospel is the gift of Jehovah's mercy, and the miracles to establish its claims, and the evidences of its truth, are all the offspring of his

benevolence. Men are justly condemned for their sins, independently of any considerations arising out of their knowledge or ignorance of the religion of Jesus Christ. If they withhold their affections from God, whose perfections are spread over his works and heralded to us from the sky, it is consistent with his moral justice to condemn and punish them. They have no claim on him to confer on them the Gospel. It is an act of pure mercy; and to aver that it must be proclaimed to men from heaven, and miracles confirming it wrought before all men, and that God must thus make it known on pain of being regarded and treated as tyrannical and unjust, is horrid impiety.

It is enough that he has endowed men with those faculties which enable them to know and love him, and set before them sufficient evidence to control their faith, so that by proper diligence they may learn to serve him aright. Men demand of God what they do not require of each other. They ask that the Gospel should be proclaimed by a voice issuing from the sky to all men; while they regard it as of no importance to attend to the means which are actually in use to disseminate this Gospel. But what human legislator ever thought it necessary to go and personally communicate to those whom he represents the law affecting their happiness in life? It is sufficient that the law is published, and that all may acquaint themselves with its provisions; and it is presumed that every man,

out of regard to his own safety, will do this. Human testimony is the medium through which this knowledge, so indispensable to our safety and happiness, is to be gained. The mass of mankind have never been present at the time of enactment to know by observation what laws are enacted; but they have evidence sufficient to satisfy them of the fact, if they are disposed to use it. Bonds are drawn every day, deeds executed, and testamentary dispositions made, of the whole of a man's property, on the testimony of witnesses that it is done according to law.

Is human testimony, then, of no value? And will he who constantly receives it, and is guided by it in respect to that which concerns his worldly happiness, be justified at last in rejecting it, respecting that which affects his everlasting welfare? Does not the inconsistency of having one set of principles for the conduct of his business and another for the conduct of matters relating to the happiness of his soul, stare him in the face? And will he not be condemned for it, since, in his eagerness to overthrow the religion of the Bible, he disregards the admonitions of conscience, contradicts the testimonies of reason and first principles of common sense, and tramples under foot the most convincing evidences ever given to the world for the establishment of truth?

Those who reject the Bible because it is not promulgated in a universal language, and is sub-

stantiated by human testimony, aim, by the assumption and application of principles of acknowledged falsehood, to subvert the strong foundations of truth. They might be convinced of the truth, did they but study the evidences of religion with the same earnest desire to know the truth with which they pursue error. But they close their eyes on these evidences, while they eagerly catch at every objection, which may lead them to view the Bible as unworthy of credit, and steel them against a belief of its revelation. Preferring to live without God in the world, they are anxious to dispose of the Bible as of a troublesome companion, by the speediest process, and on the slightest grounds. All the weight of infidel arguments with them springs from the preference which they feel to live without God, and afar from the restraints of his holy law. They thus deceive themselves through the power of affections adverse to God.

But for these wrong affections they are responsible, and for the errors which flow from them. If, turning away from the light, they seek to hide themselves in the dark caverns of infidelity, they do it at their own risk. Futile will be the effort. How much wiser and better for them to love and obey God, rather than to cast him off; to yield themselves up in submission to his government, rather than attempt to beat down his throne and trample on his sceptre and crown, and continue to

oppose him, till they fall at length beneath his power?

Whatever may be your difficulties about religion, you cannot doubt that you should love God, and serve him with a willing and obedient heart. This is your first duty, the first which natural religion inculcates and the Gospel requires of you. Whether the Bible be true or false, the word of God, or a tissue of lies, it cannot affect the reality of your obligation toward God to love and serve him. Did you ever inquire why you do not; why day after day passes away, and yet finds in you no disposition of this kind? Is it not evident that it is because your heart is wrong, and its affections fixed on the world in preference to Him; and that you choose to live without him, because you prefer to live free from the restraints which the acknowledgment of him imposes? Thus casting off your Maker, you create in yourself a direct personal interest to deny his Gospel and prove his religion false. And can you wonder at the obscurity which in your view rests on the sacred page? Are not infidel objections and difficulties the legitimate result of this infidelity of heart toward your Creator? Do you wish to discover the light, and above all things to know and love the God of truth, and be guided into the path of true religion and of happiness? Your duty is, then, plain. "If the Lord be God, follow him." Seek him with all your heart. You can-

not fail to discover your duty in his word ; and truth there delineated will dispel the cloud of error from your mind, as the glorious morning sun dissipates the mists of night.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONCERNING THE INFIDEL MAXIM, THAT IF GOD DESIRE THE HAPPINESS OF MAN AND CANNOT EFFECT IT, WHERE ARE HIS WISDOM AND HIS POWER ; IF HE CAN AND WILL NOT, WHERE IS HIS GOODNESS ?

PROMINENT among the common maxims of infidelity is one which may be thus stated : God is infinite in wisdom, power, and benevolence. As a benevolent being he must prefer the happiness of his creatures, and his wisdom and power will enable him to effect this benevolent end. If he desire to make his creatures happy and cannot, where are his wisdom and his power ; if he can and will not, where is his goodness ? Either he is not infinitely wise, powerful, and good, or all men will be safe and happy under his government. This maxim assumes different phases as it is applied to meet the various aspects of truth. Thus it is said, God is too good to punish his creatures ; he equally loves them all, and will never treat them so unjustly as to give them over to misery. The tendency of these maxims is to encourage men in their sins by assuring them of immunity from punishment. Each is based on the same false views of the moral govern-

ment of God, and will be substantially considered in the remarks now made.

That God is infinite in his perfections, is the belief of all who receive the religion of the Bible, and is denied by none but the atheist. Deistical writers generally admit his perfections, at least so far as they are discoverable by the light of nature, and acknowledge his universal government. In reasoning from his perfections respecting his treatment of men, we cannot safely omit to observe the facts which exist around us, and to correct our inferences, if erroneous, by these facts. From the mere knowledge of God as good, we cannot presume to tell how he will treat mankind, or on what principles he will govern them; because we cannot comprehend the reasons of his conduct, nor discern how his treatment of mankind will effect the great interests of his moral government, and the happiness of man. We cannot, therefore, from a mere consideration of the divine goodness, decide what principles of moral government he will adopt, or how the maintenance of such principles will affect the happiness of his intelligent creatures in this and in other worlds. It becomes necessary, therefore, not only to inquire into the principles of his government, but to view the manner in which God actually administers the affairs of his empire, to know what is or what is not consistent with his goodness, and how his wisdom and power are exerted to promote the happiness of men. We cannot, by reason-

ing *à priori*, or by arguments drawn from a view of his goodness only, with any certainty reach the true principles of his government, or learn how it is consistent for him as a being of benevolence to treat mankind.

The infidel maxim, that God, if powerful, wise, and good, will assuredly make his intelligent creatures all happy, would lead us to infer the present existence of universal happiness under his government, as certainly as to infer its existence hereafter. Applying this maxim to the actual condition of the human family, we should naturally expect to find around us happiness as universal and as unalloyed as is that of heaven; for it cannot be denied that the government of God extends to this world, and that his wise, powerful, and benevolent agency is exerted here. Guided by the skeptical maxim before us, were one who was ignorant of the moral state of mankind to be deputed from another planet to this on a tour of investigation, he would naturally expect to find nothing but happiness on earth; and the most pleasing images of this happiness would be pictured in his mind. He would be unprepared, from the view of things, as they actually exist, to have these delightful images dispelled by the stern realities of fact.

But, instead of a world so morally bright and fair, he would soon discover that he had entered one of a different character. Gloomy thoughts would fill his mind at the development of the facts which here

exist. He would see misery stalking abroad among the children of men, entering their dwellings, poisoning their cup of enjoyment, and changing their fairest prospects to disappointment. He would discover, at its touch, the bridal vesture changed into a shroud, and the songs of joy turned into the groans of anguish. He would behold some who started in life with unsullied reputation and promising hopes, chained in a convict's cell, and others sinking in despair and misery into a drunkard's grave. Tales of sorrow would reach his ears from many an unsuspected source; and he would often discover, hidden under a fair exterior, what there is a vain effort to conceal, a bleeding and a broken heart. Rudely shocked would be the sensibilities of his nature at the discovery of facts like these; and he would be ready to inquire, Are these under the government of that God who is infinitely wise, powerful, and good? Why, then, are they not happy? If he desire to make his creatures happy and cannot, where are his wisdom and power? If he can and will not, where is his goodness?

It would be evident to him, that the theory of happiness that had been drawn from a view of Jehovah's goodness only, fails in its application, and is therefore false; and that he had erred from not having first acquainted himself with the principles of the divine government, and viewed, in all their bearings, the relations of this government to man. The theory with which he started in his inquiries,

he would be compelled to abandon on a mere inspection of the manner in which the infinite God actually treats mankind. Having renounced all theories on the subject, he might, with the spirit of an inquirer, then go forth on his tour of observation to discover the facts respecting the happiness and misery of mankind, as they exist under the divine administration.

Having determined on this plan of investigation, he now enters the cottage of the Christian, marks the air of quiet and content which pervades it, the order and the social enjoyments existing there ; and he discovers, as the source of this happiness, that in this family God is loved and his law regarded. In the confidence of a pious heart reposed in God, he perceives all that is needed to impart to that Christian the lively emotions of joy.

He passes from this family to another. As he opens the door, he sees the anxious and care-worn countenance of a wife and a mother, as her children besiege her with importunities for food which it is not in her power to give them. Here is a miserable contrast to the quiet and contentment of the former scene ; and the cause of this misery soon develops itself in the drunken husband and father, who comes reeling home to send terror and dismay into the hearts of those whom he is bound to protect and love. Here God is not acknowledged, nor is his law observed. Instead of the Bible, the Age of Reason occupies a shelf above the broken ware

which is crowded into a narrow and dirty closet. Wretchedness finds here its home. Whence does it spring? The heads of both these families, are the intelligent creatures of God, and are equally the subjects of his government. They are brothers, and have both been trained up under the same pious counsels and prayers. They were heirs to a like inheritance, and God, to promote their happiness, has conferred on both distinguished mercies. The one is happy. With a cheerful heart he acknowledges his Creator as his sovereign, and rejoices in the gifts of his hand, daily ascribing to him thanksgiving and praise. The other, tormented in his conscience with guilty fears, endeavors to drown his cares in the intoxicating bowl, and under its maddening influences becomes a curse and terror to those with whom he is in life associated. And yet, to make him happy, God has throughout life continued to exert toward him his beneficent agency. But he prefers to live without God in the world, and free from the restraints of his holy law; and he turns with the spirit of a rebel from the counsels of his heavenly benefactor to tread the path of his own guilty pleasures.

The inquirer passes on, and enters the house of another. He sees the marks of grief and the habiliments of mourning. A female is in tears, and she is a widow. But yesterday, she rejoiced in the husband of her youth; now he is a tenant of the grave, laid there by the murderer's blow. Yonder

in the convict's cell sits the author of this misery, pale and ghastly. Haggard looks and dreadful groans betoken his anguish, and evince that conscience has now assumed its dreadful office.

How is it, the inquirer asks, that under the government of the infinite Jehovah this misery exists? If he desire to make his creatures happy and cannot, where are his wisdom and power? If he can and will not, where is his goodness? God is indeed infinite in his wisdom, power, and goodness, and yet misery does actually exist; but for this misery he is not responsible. It springs not from his wishes, but from the wicked conduct of those who cast off his laws, and will not have him to reign over them. If conformed to the wise principles of his government and obedient to his law, men would be happy; and he has set before them every influential motive to induce them to this obedience. But they choose their own way, forsake the guidance of his wisdom, break his law, violate their consciences, and the misery which they suffer is the natural result.

But the theory of happiness inculcated by the infidel maxim under examination takes no knowledge of the great principles of the divine government, and of the fact that the conduct of mankind has any connection with their happiness. It overlooks the obvious and important facts that God has established certain principles of moral government to which he will consistently adhere, that men are

free moral agents and fit subjects of law, and that they have an agency in producing the moral results of their own happiness or misery. So far as the truth of this maxim is concerned, it matters not where this misery exists, whether in this world, or that which is to come, since the divine government is equally extended over both. Misery in either is inconsistent with the infidel's theory of happiness, which is not, and cannot be true, because disproved by facts which are unquestionable, and open to every one's observation.

What, then, is the true theory of the divine perfections as they are employed in the promotion of human happiness? In illustrating this point, it will be necessary to take a view of our relations to God as his intelligent creatures, and of his relations to us, as the creator and moral governor of the world.

The first great fact which presents itself to our notice is, that man has come into being through the divine agency, and that for the possession of his powers and faculties he is wholly dependent on God. In connection with this fact, it is also to be observed, that, as a creature of God, man is endued with reason, and with those intellectual and moral powers which fit him to act as a free agent, and to guide his actions in accordance with the volitions of his own mind. He is conscious of being a free agent, and acknowledges that he is so by the manner in which he treats himself and others.

Thus endowed with the powers of free moral

agency, man becomes a fit subject of law, and the law of God's empire is justly extended over him. No sooner is he constituted a moral being, than he comes under obligations to God. These flow from his relations, and as soon as the relations exist, the obligations are in force. A child, so soon as it sustains the relations of a child, is bound to love and obey its parents; and the obligations of the creature toward God coexist with his relations to him. No sooner does man commence his intelligent existence, than he is bound to love God supremely. He becomes necessarily a subject of law. His obligations to God are as enduring as are his relations; and it is on the manner in which he treats these obligations that his happiness or misery depends. For such is the constitution of his nature as a moral being, that he cannot violate his known obligations to God, without giving rise to emotions of pain. He must and will feel the operations of conscience waking up in his bosom shame, remorse, and despair. To violate his known obligations to God, therefore, must render him unhappy; so that misery is the necessary and certain consequence of his sin.

But man, as a free moral agent, is not compelled to violate his obligations to God, but may observe them. He may choose him as his portion, and be happy in the enjoyment of his love. Happiness or misery in his case results directly from his own free choice. In accordance with the principles of the

divine government over him, the happiness or misery is all originated by himself. Were he not endowed with freedom, he would not be susceptible of either. It is his conscious freedom in action which is the source of his susceptibility to happiness or woe.

In creating man, to fit him for the exalted happiness of which he is susceptible, it was necessary to confer upon him the capacities which he now possesses, and the moral endowments which constitute him a free and responsible agent, and a fit subject of law. Without such endowments, his happiness as a moral being would be impossible. Such happiness can no more exist in the heart of one who acts without freedom, than it can exist in a mere machine. The spring of all moral happiness in the intelligent creatures of God, is the freedom which each possesses, and the consciousness that the path of virtue in which he walks is his own chosen path.

But in the way toward the accomplishment of the great and good end which the benevolent God proposed by creating man a moral and accountable being, arises an incidental evil. This evil originates in the conduct of man under a plan of government which is eminently adapted to secure the greatest amount of happiness—a plan which is good, and is wisely formed to give the reign of happiness the widest possible extension. Under this plan of government, man is endowed with such freedom that he may be happy or miserable, according to his own

free choice. As a free moral agent, he may obey God and be happy, or disobey and suffer the consequences. God could not create man a free agent, and subject him to that degree of trial best adapted to develop his highest moral powers and to promote his happiness, without exposing him to the possibility of sinning. If his object had been simply to prevent his sinning, he might have thrown around him such restraints, and placed him in such circumstances, that the evil would have been avoided.

If a parent aim, as the great end of education, to exclude his children from profane and vicious associations, he may shut them up from the world ; but if it is his object to train them up in the best manner to act well their part in life, he can secure this end only by permitting them to mingle with society, and carefully guarding them against the evils incidental to this course. In like manner, it is part of Jehovah's good and wise plan to subject his intelligent creatures on earth to that degree of trial which is best adapted to promote their happiness ; and this he could not do without exposing them to sin.

If it be asked, Why could not God have gained this good without the evil, if he is omnipotent ? It may be replied by asking why one thing is better than another ? Is not omnipotence, even, to be guided by wisdom and goodness in the selection of that which is best ? How unreasonable to think that omnipotence should be stretched to its utmost

limit to accomplish that which is neither the wisest nor best as a plan of government adapted to promote the happiness of man !

The remedy for the evil to which man is incidentally exposed under the government of God, is not to be sought in any restrictions imposed on the freedom of his will, but in the motives and influences which the benevolent God uses to encourage obedience and to prevent sin. In these his goodness is displayed. And when, despite of these influences, man breaks through the moral restraints which, out of regard to his happiness, are placed around him, when he casts off God, tramples on his law, and will not have him to reign over him, he himself assumes the responsibility of his own conduct, and of that misery which is its result.

But this misery, dreadful as it may be, is not an evil to any one but the guilty man who brings it on himself. It does not reflect dishonor on God ; for his conduct is fully justified by the excellent principles of his moral government, and the influences benevolently exerted to save man from this ruin. In view of these, man can never charge God with unkindness, but the universe is witness to the excellence of his character and to his gracious conduct toward man ; and at the same time to the guilt of those who sin against him ; so that the glory of God will be manifested even in the punishment of his ungrateful creatures who will not have him to reign over them.

The misery suffered by the wicked in consequence of their sin, as it reflects no dishonor on God, so neither does it inflict an injury on any of his creatures; but it upholds and strengthens the law of his empire, and sustains those great principles of truth in which the happiness of all his subjects depends; as the misery of the convict in his cell, though an evil to himself, is yet beneficial to society, by upholding the law in which the peace, security, and happiness of the whole community centre.

Goodness in God, then, is not inconsistent with wickedness in man, nor with the misery which results from this wickedness, for man becomes wicked by his own free and responsible act, continues unreconciled to God by his own act; and the misery which he suffers in consequence, though an evil to himself, reflects honor on God for what he has done to make him happy, and exerts an influence positively good, through its sustaining effect on that law which represents the happiness of unnumbered millions in his empire.

This theory of happiness is widely different from that of the infidel maxim before us; and it has this merit, which the other has not, of being in exact accordance with the facts of the divine government as they appear in the world. In the wise exercise of his intelligent powers, man may choose God as his portion, and be happy in his obedience; or he may prefer to live without him. He may turn unto him in true repentance, and be happy in the joys

of pardoning mercy ; or he may yield to the temptations which cluster around his path, and may prepare himself for a bed of thorns in this world, and for fiery indignation when he shall appear before God in judgment.

Shall it be denied that God is good because man is wicked ? Shall men set up a theory of government directly opposed to facts, and then claim that under it they are safe ? They may, at their peril. They may, by lies, make the heart of the righteous sad, and strengthen the hands of the wicked that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life ; but so sure as God is righteous, who taketh vengeance, they will fall in their own mischief, and in the net which they have laid shall their own feet be taken.

But what becomes of Jehovah's power, it is asked, if, when he desires the happiness of his creatures, they are not made happy ? To this it may be replied, that the power of God to mould matter by his creative will, and his power to control and govern free and intelligent beings, depend on very different principles. When we say that God is infinite in power, we mean that he can do everything that is an object of power. As omnipotent, he can create a world and then destroy it ; but he cannot create a world and not create it at the same time. He cannot make a thing to be and not to be at the same time ; he cannot make two and two five ; nor a triangle and circle of the same linear shape, because

these things, being inconsistent and contradictory in themselves, are not proper objects of power, and lie not within its province.

Neither can God, as a being of perfect justice, do an unjust act ; nor, as a being of truth, violate his word ; nor, as a being of goodness, be unkind ; neither, as a being of truth, can he speak falsely. Though it might be within the power of a being who is possessed of natural omnipotence to do that which is morally wrong, yet it is not within the province of such omnipotence as God possesses, or of omnipotence as it is combined in him with perfect moral attributes.

Power, as possessed by God, is not simply omnipotence, but omnipotence combined with wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. It is power wisely exerted, directed to the best ends, and putting forth the best means for the accomplishment of those ends. Though he is omnipotent, yet God cannot, therefore, do an act which is unwise or wrong. He cannot act inconsistently with his own moral perfections, any more than he can perform acts which are physically contradictory to each other.

The omnipotence of God is therefore restricted to the performance of those acts which are the objects of power, and are not inconsistent with his own perfections. He may be infinite in wisdom, power, and goodness, and yet morally unable to exert his omnipotence in the promotion of human happiness in any other way than through the motives and in-

fluences which he uses for this purpose. He must, as a being infinitely wise, act consistently with the principles of his own moral government; and he may not, though omnipotent, depart from those wise and benevolent principles which he has fixed for the control of his own actions, and on which the happiness of all intelligent beings depends. Omnipotence, therefore, will not secure the happiness of man, unless it be secured on holy and just principles. And what principle is there, either of justice or goodness, which demands that God should make the man happy who prefers to live without him in the world, and who wickedly casts off his law, and tramples his love under his feet? Should he receive and treat him as a friend, while man thus exhibits the spirit of a rebel, he would do a great moral wrong. He would violate the principles of his own moral government, and would do an irreparable injury to all holy beings under it, by himself countenancing disobedience and rewarding crime. He cannot thus exert his power, therefore, for it would be contrary to the dictates of wisdom, and inconsistent with that plan of government which wisdom and goodness have led him to devise.

Having constituted mankind free, responsible and dependent, and adopted a system of moral government which is eminently wise, just in its own nature and glorious to himself, conducive also to the happiness of his intelligent creation, he can exert his power to make men happy in no other consistent

way than in accordance with these wise and holy principles, by the influences of his Spirit, and the convictions and persuasions of truth. The same is true as it respects Jehovah's wisdom. It is wisdom guided by his infinite moral perfections, and which cannot be improperly or wrongfully exerted in any case.

With these principles in view, we may contemplate some of the exhibitions of Jehovah's wisdom, power, and goodness as they are exhibited in the influences which he exerts on man to save him from his sins and make him happy under his government. If we would ascertain the feelings of God toward man, and whether or not he interests himself to save him, we must view the evidences of his goodness, and of the benevolent exertions of his power to make him happy, as they are displayed in the worlds of nature and of grace.

In the world of nature we discover his bountiful provision for the necessities of man. Not only has he endowed him with susceptibilities of enjoyment, and with those powers and capacities which fit him for the attainment of true happiness, but the world of nature is full of objects which may waken these susceptibilities to action, and inspire his energies to secure the blessings thus set before him. The goodness and wisdom of God, as exerted to make him happy, are thus displayed. His mercies, which are new every morning, are repeated with every evening shade. Each day brings with it in quick re-

turn additional tokens of his beneficence, and calls for fresh returns of gratitude and praise.

So, also, in the world of grace do we discover the manifest tokens of Jehovah's watchfulness and care. From the period of the apostasy, we perceive the evidences of his earnest desire to recover man from ruin, and of his wisdom and power exerted for this purpose. The proclamation of mercy was made in the very garden where he had sinned, and this mercy was manifested in different ages and by various acts of grace and of compassion, till the Messiah's advent.

We see his Son on the cross expiating by his own blood the sins of men, and opening to an apostate world a wide and effectual door for their return. The sacrifice of the cross is an evidence to the world of the sincerity of his desires for our happiness. Greater evidence of God's love to the world there cannot be than the sacrifice and sufferings of the Lord of glory, who left the abode of angels out of pity for man, and consented to die for him in untold agonies.

In what way could Jehovah, had he so desired, have expressed to the world, not his willingness only that man should be saved, but his earnest and inexpressible desire to do all that he consistently can, as a wise and good being, to confer on man the happiness which he had forfeited?

Accompanying the gift of his Son for our redemption is the Holy Spirit, whose office it is to convince

of sin, and renew and sanctify the heart. Accompanied by this blessed agent is the Word, which is also sent forth to turn the guilty of our race, the lost, and the perishing, into the way of salvation. There is not only no hinderance to man's happiness interposed by God, but every facility given to promote it. The influences of Almighty power and grace are benevolently exerted to raise mankind from degradation and ruin, to the holiness and bliss of heaven. These are such displays of the infinite wisdom, power, and goodness of God as are consistent with the principles of his government, and with the moral nature of man. All these may fail to make him happy, because man as a free agent may cast them all aside. He may oppose those influences which God, as the head of a moral government founded in wisdom and benevolence, may consistently exert over him. He may defeat the best scheme of benevolence ever contrived for the promotion of human happiness, so far as his own happiness is concerned, by refusing to submit himself to its holy principles, and steadfastly resisting them unto the end, and he may spurn the benevolent arm of the Omnipotent extended to turn him aside from the path of death.

The system of moral government which God has adopted regards and treats man as a free agent. It controls and governs him by motives and influences adapted to his moral nature, and not by brute force. And so long as God shall adhere to this wise

and benevolent system, may man ruin himself under it, defeating by his own conduct the kind provisions for his happiness. All the influences which Omnipotence may deem it wise or consistent for himself to exert upon man, may fail to reclaim and save him. But if man thus oppose the wise plan of God for his happiness, he himself assumes the responsibility of that act, and his misery is attributable to himself only. Infinite as is God in wisdom, power, and goodness, yet this does not necessarily secure the happiness of his intelligent creatures who are free in their actions ; for in the exercise of this freedom, they may pursue such a course under his wise and holy government as to result in their own misery. The acts by which the sinning angels fell, and man apostatized, were their own, and justly do they suffer the consequences.

Though God sincerely desire the happiness of his creatures, yet he may fail of it in particular instances, not through any deficiency in his power, or wisdom, or goodness, but because it is not consistent with the wise principles of his moral government to exert any other agency than he now does for this purpose. He cannot consistently love and reward the man who hates him ; and having done all for his happiness that mercy demands of him, he may leave him to his fate.

The infinite perfections of Jehovah do not require him to prevent the existence of the misery which man brings on himself in consequence of his sin.

They neither ensure his happiness in this life, nor in the life to come. It is through obedience to God only that man can attain this happiness. But if he will not obey ; if, instead thereof, he continue to oppose all the influences which God in mercy exerts to reclaim and save him, there is no remedy. Neither the wisdom, power, nor goodness of God will interpose to prevent his ruin. He opposes that principle of obedience to God which is essential to his just supremacy, and even to the existence of his moral government, and it would be as inconsistent with his character for Jehovah thus to save him, as it would be for him to lie. All his holy attributes are arrayed against the man who dares thus to cast him off. He cannot be happy in this world ; and since the empire of God is universal, he cannot be happy in the next. Yea, so long as Jehovah continues to maintain himself as the Sovereign of the Universe, it is impossible that the man who will not have him to reign over him should be happy.

That the wicked are left to the suffering consequent on sin, is not to be ascribed to any deficiency in the wisdom, power, or goodness of God, but to their own free conduct, under a plan of government which is the best, in which they cast aside his laws, and choose in preference the path of their own devising. The great issue on which the happiness of the race individually depends is the point whether they will obey God or not. And all that the errors of the skeptical can do cannot impugn the moral justice of

that act, by which God, in the majesty of his sovereign authority and power, casts out of his kingdom, into the deep damnation of hell, all who trample on his laws, and will not consent to receive and own him as their God. 'The proud unbeliever may learn with emotions of deep surprise, that the truth of the Bible, in respect to man's future happiness, accords not only with the light of nature, but with the convictions of the human conscience and with the dictates of common sense. For, it is the result of all our inquiries on this subject, that to obey and love God is the only way to be happy under his government, and that they who refuse to own him as their God, shall never dwell in his blissful presence.

CHAPTER IX.

CONCERNING THE SKEPTICAL MAXIM, THAT RELIGION IS
A GROSS DELUSION.

THE impression designed to be produced by the representations of infidel writers is, that religion is a gross delusion. Hume and Gibbon, in their historical works, ever exhibit the actions of religious persons in such a light, or ascribe such motives to them as tend to persuade the reader that their religion is only feigned, and that they are guilty of a detestable hypocrisy. The same is true of the great mass of skeptical authors. Indeed, many of them are unwilling to ascribe to Christians that honesty in their professed religious opinions, which the same authors ascribe to the followers of Vishnoo or Jugernaut.

It is unquestionably true, that if religion is to be judged by the inconsistencies and follies of some of its professed friends, and by that test alone, there is too much ground for the cavils of skeptical men. If the religion of the Romish Church is to be regarded as the true religion of the Bible, it must be admitted that there is abundant room for censure. A mistaken opinion of what the true religion of the Bible is, has prevailed among skeptical men. They

have been accustomed to regard it as chiefly consisting in those manners and customs which are attached to religious worship, and which are merely external. Of religion existing in the heart and regulating the life, they know nothing. And yet, this is the only religion that is in accordance with the oracles of God, and is of any value to mankind.

This is a kind of religion which the authors of the skeptical literature of the age, being wholly ignorant themselves, ignorantly condemn and ridicule. All their influence is exerted to present spiritual religion to the world as an imposture. Hence it has become a common maxim of infidelity, that religion is a gross delusion. Let us, then, ascertain whether there is any real ground for a reproach of this nature.

It is beyond all doubt, that the most weighty evidence to the truth of religion may be found in the views, feelings, and conduct of Christians themselves; and that they have undoubted proof of the reality of religion in their own personal experience. This source of evidence has been greatly neglected, and its importance undervalued. But the proofs drawn thence of the truth of religion are invaluable, and may be adduced to show that there is a reality in the religion of Jesus Christ which skeptics are slow to admit. This religion, proved by experience to exist, accords with the representations of the Bible, and is itself ample proof of the divinity of the Scriptures. Several points demand our notice.

I. CHRISTIANS ARE THEMSELVES ABLE TO DISCOVER IN THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE, SATISFACTORY EVIDENCE OF THE TRUTH AND REALITY OF RELIGION.

The operations of our minds are as proper a subject of examination and of reflection as are our actions, and are equally susceptible of certainty. A particular state of mind is known to an individual himself; and its existence is as capable of being ascertained as is any other fact in nature. Every one may know with entire certainty what he loves and hates, for this is a matter of consciousness. The same is true of all his moral preferences.

If it is denied that a person can know his own moral feelings, we reply that the facts of experience contradict this assertion. Men not only know how they feel at a given time, but they are able to call up by reflection, and to describe to others, the various emotions with which they have been affected. This is the universal experience of mankind.

But it may be asked why so many are deceived as to their moral state and think themselves Christians, who afterward confess that they have been deceived, if a man may thus certainly know his own moral feelings? To this we reply, that men deceive themselves, not because they do not know their own feelings, but because they draw wrong inferences from such feelings. They infer that they know by experience what true religion is, when these feelings are not such as to meet the demands of this

religion and come up to its true standard. One may feel happy, and know that he feels so, and yet the inference that he is a Christian may be wholly erroneous. His feelings of happiness may spring from an erroneous view of his own moral state. His inference may be false, because drawn from other premises than a mistaken consciousness, and he may therefore deceive himself as to his real character and standing in the sight of God ; while no one might properly question the fact that he felt happy, or gave a true delineation of his feelings to others. A man who finds a roll of counterfeit money, may feel as pleased as if it were genuine, and may infer that he is rich on this account. His inference may be false, yet no one need doubt that he feels the happiness he describes. So one may infer that he is a Christian from feelings which he knows and can describe, but which are not true Christian feelings, and may involve himself in error in consequence of his wrong inferences.

If it be true that man is competent to know and describe his own feelings, the question arises, Can the Christian discover in the facts of his experience evidence sufficient to satisfy his mind, judging candidly and impartially, that religion is a reality ? There is no doubt that he can. Comparing the state of his moral affections with what it once was, he finds in himself a great change. He once disregarded the claim of God on his love and service,

treated his holy word with neglect, trampled on his law, disobeyed his Gospel, was profane, unbelieving, and sensual: but now he is transformed in his moral feelings and character. Once he lived without prayer, scoffed at religion, was indifferent to the spread of the Gospel, and the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom; now he is possessed by opposite sentiments. God, once feared and hated, now presents himself to him as the most lovely being in the universe. The world of nature seems clad with new beauty, because in everything around him he sees the marks of the divine intelligence and goodness. The world appears changed. Its sinful pleasures no longer delight, but are loathed as earthly and sensual, while he seeks delightful communion with the people of God, and rejoices in the hope of spending his eternity with them in the realms of everlasting bliss.

This change in his moral feelings and conduct he discovers to accord with the nature of the kingdom of grace as it is delineated in the Bible, and it evinces to him the truth and reality of religion. He knows its truth and reality by his own experience. He has the witness in himself. The evidence is identified with his own conscious being. He is a witness to himself of the reality of that spiritual change through which he has passed, and has the evidence that the record which God hath given of his Son is true.

II. CHRISTIANS ARE COMPETENT WITNESSES OF THE FACTS WHICH OCCUR IN THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE.

We are as competent to testify to the operations of our minds, as we are to our bodily sensations. When a physician inquires of a patient, no one doubts that the patient is able to give a correct statement of his feelings. He may not know the nature of his disease, and may draw wrong inferences from what he feels; but still he does know how he feels, and is able to state where the pain which afflicts him is seated.

So the Christian is equally competent to give a statement of his own moral feelings, and can describe in language generally understood the facts of his own experience. He can state how he once felt toward God, and how he now feels; how he once regarded sin, and how he now regards it; what views he once had of the way of salvation, and how he now views it; how he once felt and acted in respect to Christ his Saviour, and how he now feels and acts; and what were the objects for which he once lived, and for what he is living now. These are facts of consciousness which any one who can clothe his thoughts in language is as competent to state respecting his own moral feelings, as he is to give his views of agriculture, commerce, and the mechanic arts.

III. THE EVIDENCE TO THE TRUTH OF RELIGION DERIVED FROM THE FACTS OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE IS WORTHY OF ENTIRE CONFIDENCE.

There are no facts respecting which there is more weight of evidence. Christians in every age have uniformly testified to these facts, and have given the same descriptions of the change wrought in their hearts by the converting grace of God. This evidence is drawn, not from a few individuals inhabiting a remote country, who have imbibed the prejudices of the community where they happened to be born, but from Christians of all ages and all nations—Jews, Greeks, Africans, Asiatics, Europeans, or natives of the Pacific Islands—all, without distinction of birth, country, or education, agree in their delineation of that moral change which constitutes the new birth, and of its effect in their hearts and upon their lives.

Wherever the Gospel has prevailed, a multitude of witnesses have arisen who have testified to the renovation of their hearts, and to the existence in themselves of those affections which constitute true religion. These witnesses consist of men differing in their sentiments in other respects, men of opposite political attachments, of contrary opinions upon other subjects, and of different sectarian bias, often carrying their differences so far that they can in no wise be suspected of collusion, and the co-

incidence of whose testimony can be none other than the complete coincidence of truth.

Of those who testify to a change of heart toward God, and to the existence of new views and feelings in themselves, many were once openly infidels, enemies to the Cross of Christ, and, like Paul the Apostle, persecutors of the Church. All of them were in heart opposed to the opinions and feelings of which they have afterward gratefully acknowledged themselves to be possessed. This fact is of great weight, and is worthy to be impressed on every mind. There was a time when the Christian had made no religious profession. This profession has not been ordinarily made till he has reached the years of discretion, and often not until mature age, when the habits have become fixed, connections in life formed, friendships acquired, and opinions established. Nor let it be thought that the opinions of that age are in all cases favorable to religion; on the contrary, they are often most adverse. But men who have long lived in the neglect of the Gospel, hating it, opposing a belief in its doctrines, and making no pretensions to a religious character, have suddenly had their attention arrested and been converted; and their scoffs at religion have been turned into prayer.

The profession of this change of heart has often led them into severe conflicts. It has occasioned the breaking up of their former connections in life, and the renunciation of old opinions, old habits, and

old friends. Every motive sometimes apparently conspires to prevent a declaration of the fact. Love of consistency, pride, and shame would often lead men to withhold a declaration of the change they have experienced, were they not animated by the principle of true Christian sincerity. But when they have learned what religion is by the experience of its wonder-working power on their hearts, they can be turned by nothing from an open declaration of the fact, and from giving their testimony to the peace and joy they have experienced.

To this testimony they adhere, amid temptations, and in view of threatened death. When did a Christian ever recant this testimony? The scaffold has groaned beneath the weight of its victims, slain because they would not renounce Christ. The stake and the den of wild beasts have been the instruments of torture and death to multitudes, for the same cause. Nothing so much surprised the officers of the Roman government, who were employed in the execution of Christians, as the constancy with which they suffered, testifying to the last their confidence in the religion which they had experienced.

But not to men only has this testimony been given. Christians have appealed to God as knowing the sincerity of their hearts for the truth of their own experience. In the solemn hour of death, that awful and honest hour, how often does the Christian summon his family around him and deliver to them

his dying testimony to the reality of religion, and to its power on the heart and life, and counsel them, as they value their eternal happiness, to walk in the faith of Jesus Christ, and trust for salvation in the merits of his death !

This is testimony to what he has himself experienced ; and can it be despised as worthless ? Where can there be found on any other subject testimony of more intrinsic value ? It is not given by the ignorant and profligate, but by men of unbending moral integrity, whose statements on other subjects would never be questioned.

If you would have a witness of superior acquaintance with mankind, one who mingled in society as it became a philosopher and Christian, who, by careful observation, had become thoroughly conversant with the springs of human thought and feeling, and whose wisdom enabled him to apply himself with the greatest advantage to the detection of false experience in himself and others—such an one was President Dwight. Yet he was experimentally a Christian, and believed and practiced the truths which, as a public teacher, he so powerfully and successfully recommended.

Of equal worth, but superior in mental acuteness, was Edwards—a man of uncommon intellectual power, capable of pursuing successfully the profoundest metaphysical inquiries, who was not to be deceived by appearances, but who, with a power of discrimination possessed by few, entered

into the labyrinths of the human mind, traced out with keen discernment its operations, unfolded all its secret workings, and rose from his investigation the wisest, brightest, humblest Christian of his age. This great philosopher devoted his extraordinary powers for years to the development of Christian experience in himself and others, for the purpose of distinguishing it from falsehood, without having been able to discover the falsity of religion, or the truth of the infidel's assertion that the Christian's experience and hope are a dream.

These, you may say, were ministers of the Gospel. They were so. But they were men before they became ministers; and they assumed the sacred office only in consequence of their own overpowering convictions of the truth of religion as it had been developed in their own experience.

The same is true of St. Augustine, who spent his early life in profligacy, but after reaching the years of manhood was suddenly arrested in his wicked career, and became a pillar in the Church of Christ. There are many like him, who have not only changed their course of life, but their profession, that they might the more effectually advance that cause of whose truth they had become convinced by their own experience.

Would you have witnesses from other walks in life, how many could you discover of profound legal knowledge accustomed to examine and weigh testimony, who, like Chief Justice Hale, have given their

minds to the examination of religion, and have not doubted its reality ; but who have themselves been bright examples of the converting grace of God, exhibiting in their lives the blessed influences of the Gospel, sweetly blended with all that the world calls great? How many, who, like the Apostle Paul, were once the bitter opposers of religion ; but who, having experienced its converting power on their hearts, have become its ardent friends, and who could be hindered by neither stripes, imprisonment, nor death, from proclaiming the mercy of God to the chief of sinners?

How many, in this age, are so persuaded of the truth of religion by their own experience, as cheerfully to leave their country and friends, and go to heathen lands to toil and die for the spread of that Gospel which is the source of their sweetest hopes ! Not to amass a fortune and to return do they tempt a foreign clime ; but they go from the solemn conviction that it is their duty to spread the Gospel, and for this they suffer the greatest privations, and expose themselves to death in sultry climes, and amid barbarous tribes. These witnesses, however they may differ on other subjects, when converted, all give the same descriptions of the change of their hearts, and of the effect of this change upon their lives. They love God, hate sin, believe on Jesus Christ, love the duty of prayer, and maintain communion with each other as the members of the body of Christ.

View the concurrence of the testimony given in writings of these men. Read the practical works of Moses, Samuel, David, Paul, John, St. Augustine, Thomas a' Kempis, Baxter, Bunyan, Flavel, Saurin, Newton, Scott, Wilberforce, Erskine, Fuller, Davies, Edwards, and Payson, men who have lived in different ages, and who were of different characters and pursuits in life, and you will discover in them all the same delineations of Christian experience; of what they themselves once were when in their sins, and of what they became through the converting grace of God. You may take their writings, and sit down by the unlettered Christian, who has never heard of their names even, and read to him their delineations of Christian feeling, and he will instantly acknowledge them to be the truth; and he decides, not from any ability he has to examine different systems, and trace their consistency with learned theological creeds, but from their accordance with his own experience; and he unhesitatingly affirms, this is true, for this is what I have felt.

On the other hand, you may select from the writings of all other men who have never experienced this change of heart, the most striking and powerful descriptions of the God of nature, and the most popular essays on morality and religion, and set them before him as a full description of religious experience, and he will reject them at once; or he will say, as did Mary at the sepulchre

of Christ, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." He will discover in them nothing of the true spirit of Christianity, and will decide from the knowledge acquired by his own experience, that they are the productions of men who knew not true religion.

But it may be asked, since the view which men take of religion is modified by the bias of their affections, may not the testimony of the Christian to his own experience be partial? To this we reply, that few men are so unbiased as not to be exposed to partiality in favor of their own opinions. But in what way does partiality, in this instance, exhibit itself? Men are not born Christians. They become so only through conversion. Before conversion, the Christian's partialities are all against religion. If an infidel, he is at war with its holy principles. If an unbeliever, he is still opposed, in heart, to the humbling doctrines of the cross. That change of heart by which one becomes a Christian, always occurs in those whose partialities till then were uniformly against religion. So that this fact confirms and strengthens the position that the Christian's testimony is worthy of all credit.

Who has the greatest apparent motive to testify falsely? If religion be a delusion, the Christian is as safe as the infidel; if it is not a delusion, the infidel has everything to fear. His hopes and fears, therefore, are intensely interested to make out the falsity of religion. If he fail to do so, he is lost.

Consequently, he acts under the strongest bias of feeling in his rejection of Christianity. But if the Christian fail, he stands on the same ground with the infidel. So that the greatest apparent motives to deceive himself and to believe a lie, are all on the side of the infidel.

But it is boldly proclaimed by the infidel, that religion is a delusion. Admitting it, for the sake of argument, to be so, how will it comport with the facts of Christian experience? Should the infidel learn from the different members of the Church of Christ the facts of their experience, he might say to one, "There is no such religion as you imagine yourself to be possessed of. It is true that you once delighted to profane God's name and his holy Sabbath, that you once loved the practice of vice, but now have broken off your sins by repentance, and have become a changed man. Your vicious courses have been reformed, and your neglect of God changed into a dutiful regard for him. I admit the change in you to be very great, but your pretended religion is not the cause of it; it is a miserable delusion which has come over you."

To another he might say, "I knew you when you were intemperate, abusive to your family, and a hater of all that is good; when you never prayed, nor acknowledged your Creator in the presence of your household by any act of worship. I see that you are changed; that you now walk in the path of sobriety, and love to honor God. You have come

under this miserable delusion which men call religion, and I pity you from the bottom of my heart."

To a third he might say, "When you were in your right mind, you hugged your gold, and lived for the pleasures of the world only. But now you are changed. You give your money away for the benefit of others, you feed the hungry, clothe the naked, instruct the ignorant, and send the Gospel to the destitute; and it is because you are under a delusion."

To another he might say, "You once trembled at the thought of death. Disease alarmed you, and the grave filled you with apprehension; but now, since this delusion has come upon you, all your fears are gone, for you are expecting in the dark valley of death to meet your Saviour, and to enter with him into everlasting rest."

How inconsistent with reason is it to ascribe this change of heart and life which the Christian has experienced to a mere delusion! How irrational to attribute such uniform and blessed effects to so absurd a cause! If a delusion were the source of those views and feelings which the Christian cherishes, it would be the most consistent, rational, and happy delusion which ever affected the mind of man. But there is no such delusion. The idle surmise that the Christian deceives himself into a life of virtue and religion, cannot demolish the facts of his own experience, or shake his confidence

in that religion which is the unfailing source of his sweetest hopes. The foundation on which he builds is truth, which stands in the ocean of error like a mighty rock on its everlasting base. The mists of ignorance may conceal it, the surges of unbelief and the angry waves of sin may break around it ; but it stands, the rock of eternal truth, on which the Christian safely builds his everlasting hopes.

It is evident, from what has been advanced, that any system of religion which does not teach that a change of heart toward God is necessary to happiness with him in the future world, is utterly delusive and false. This great moral change is proved to exist by the testimony of Christian experience, independently of any evidence drawn from the sacred Scriptures. We have inquired into the facts of this experience as they are exhibited to us in nature, and separate from any consideration as to whether the Bible be true or not. We find these facts existing in respect to those who profess to love God, and who evince by their lives that this love is genuine ; and in view of them, not a doubt can reasonably exist in any mind, of the truth and reality of that religion which makes this change in the moral affections of the mind indispensable to enjoyment with God in heaven ; and from this it follows, that they who trust in a system of belief which does not include the necessity of this great moral change to happiness with God in a future world, trust in error. This infidels do.

They believe in no religion of the heart, and no change of the moral affections toward God, but repose their confidence in the vain hope that the Bible will prove untrue, and the religion of the Christian exhibit itself as but a phantasy of the imagination.

In like manner does universalism deny a change of heart, and prove itself to have no existence in the testimonies of God's word. So also does the religion of the moralist, and every other system which denies or explains away the necessity or the fact of that moral change in the heart toward God which has been described. They are all based in error, and are as false as they are delusive; and no man can trust in them, and not sooner or later discover that the end thereof is the way of death.

It is also evident from the subject which has been discussed, that they who are not conscious of having experienced this change of heart, are wholly destitute of true religion. They are not Christians in the legitimate use of that term. They know not by their experience what true religion is—they may have been born amid Christian institutions, have been baptized at the holy font, and lived in accordance with the customs of a Christian people, but they are destitute of true love to God and of the spirit of holy obedience.

True religion is experimental, consisting in right affections toward God, and a life corresponding to these affections. No man can possess it, or know what it is, excepting by his experience. It were

easier by a mere description to convey the knowledge of the taste of honey to one who had never tasted it, than to convey the knowledge of what that love to God is in which true religion consists to a person without religious experience. How absurd, then, is it for men who know experimentally nothing of this state of mind, to pronounce that a delusion of which they are thus wholly ignorant! By their own admission they are out of the pale of correct judgment on this great subject. They may scoff at religion, and hold it up to contempt, but they know not what they revile. The argument should be approved to every man's reason, that if religion consists in the feelings which have been described, and is productive of such blessed results, it cannot be a delusion, but has a reality which commends it to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

When we open the Bible, we find this religion of the heart portrayed, as it is found to exist in fact, and that the testimonies of this holy word are exactly accordant with the experience of the Christian. Here, then, are two great mirrors, the mirror of nature and the mirror of the Bible, and these, while they reflect light on each other, both pour forth their radiance to enlighten you, and to show that you must be born again, or you cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Say not, then, as many do, I will not come to the light lest my deeds should be reproved, but come, renouncing your sins, believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you

shall be saved. You may choose to follow the bias of your own heart, rather than yield to the conviction of truth, but you cannot be safe in such a course. It is the path of danger and of death. Turn from it while you may. Submit yourself in the spirit of true penitence unto God, and you shall enjoy the assurance of his love ; for “ he that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself,” and he “ shall not come into condemnation, but hath passed from death unto life.”

CHAPTER X.

CONCERNING THE SOURCE OR ORIGIN OF INFIDELITY.

JESUS CHRIST knew the hearts of men ; and aware of the hostile feelings of the Jews, he avoided exposure to their wiles ; and when his disciples went up to Jerusalem to the feast of the Tabernacles, he remained in Galilee. But in the midst of the feast, he also went up, and entered into the temple and taught. While thus engaged, the Pharisees and Chief Priests sent officers to apprehend him. But so interested in his discourses did they become, that they neglected the object of their mission ; and when inquired of by the Chief Priests why they had not brought him, they replied, “ Never man spake like this man.” Then answered the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived ? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him ?

This appeal was made to the early prejudices of these officers, and was an attempt to enlist the popular feeling of respect for their rulers, against the claims of Jesus. It was the object of the Chief Priests to awaken prejudice against him. By prejudice we mean a judgment of the mind formed without due examination, and under the influence of biased feelings. It is in all cases a dangerous

foe to truth. Truth needs investigation with a clear head and an honest heart ; but prejudice, or a prejudgment of the mind formed under the influence of previous bias, precludes such an investigation.

Never was there exhibited a more impressive example of the power of prejudice, than in the treatment of Jesus Christ by his misguided countrymen. There are no bounds to the presumptiveness of the heart when its corrupt affections are excited against the truth by prejudice. At every truth on which the immortal hopes of man are built, or in which his social happiness centres, the assaults of wicked men have been directed, and popular prejudice has been wielded as an instrument for its overthrow.

But such appeals to prejudice, however successful, are at war with honest investigation. Even if prejudice be occasionally allied with truth, the truth needs no such ally. No dependence can be placed on its influence, since, not being subject to reason, it may change with every shifting tide of affection or of interest.

It should be remarked, however, that truth is incapable of being affected by prejudice, though the opinions of men respecting the truth may be affected. Truth exists independently of human opinions, and is in its nature immutable. We purpose to inquire into the influence which prejudice exerts on the religious opinions of men, with a view to discover its bearing on the existence and origin of infidelity.

Let it be observed, as the source of prejudice in respect to religion, that the great principle by which mankind are generally governed, is that of supreme regard for themselves. Every man naturally regards his own happiness first, and is willing that others should enjoy theirs so far as it does not conflict with his. No one can observe the feelings of mankind, as developed in their conduct, without acknowledging the correctness of this remark. It is this supreme regard for one's own interest and happiness, irrespective of others, which constitutes the essence of depravity ; and it is in this selfish habit of the mind, and the misconceived opinions cherished in relation to the nature of true happiness, that we discover the origin of religious prejudice. Pride of opinion and pride of reason spring from selfishness. This it is which leads man to confide in himself and to distrust others. Suspicion and jealousy are the natural fruits of self-confidence. These lead a man to start in life with the impression that he is to have his own way, and to pursue that path to which his inclinations tend.

In this feeling are imbedded the elements of religious prejudice. Under the domination of selfishness, and of that self-confidence which springs from it, man is naturally prejudiced against everything which interferes with the enjoyment of the worldly pleasures on which he sets his heart. A person governed by a supreme desire to become rich, will naturally feel opposed to any measures

of the civil government, or of the community, which will curtail his profits. He is prejudiced against them because they interfere with his own private ends. He is inimical to everything which he conceives to be injurious to his business, and which tends to diminish his gains. And this illustrates the feelings of man under the divine government in relation to everything which crosses the path of his inclinations.

Though under the control of one who cannot with impunity be resisted, yet man dissents from his Creator as to the best means of his own happiness. He regards it as essential to this happiness that he act out his sinful inclinations without restraint. But God points out a different path, and sets before him obedience to his law as the only means to attain true happiness ; and to influence him by the most powerful motives, he commands him, under the fear of his displeasure, to observe and do all that he requires.

Here, then, begins a conflict between the pride of the natural heart and the demands of God. While eagerly pursuing, as the means of his happiness, the pleasures of the world, man comes to remember God, and perceives an influence thrown around him through which he cannot easily break. At every point to which his sinful inclinations tend, the law of God meets him, hedges him in, and threatens him with the severest punishment for disobedience. But man does not love such restraint,

nor the being who imposes it. He wishes to guide his actions in accordance with his own wisdom, and his pride revolts at the control which God claims to exercise over him through his law. He prefers to seek his happiness in his own way, untrammelled by the fear of one who claims the right of a Creator over him, and whose will he has no power to resist.

The covetous, sensual, and worldly are met in the full career of their folly by the stern and invincible mandate of Jehovah, as expressed in his holy law ; and at this point begins the operation of prejudice. It springs from the moral position of mankind under the divine government, and is a feeling to which, as selfish and unholy beings, they are naturally subject. For if there be a God, if he have prescribed a law, if this law control their actions and meet at every point, and resist the indulgence of their predominant passions, it is a sufficient reason, in their estimation, why they should think hardly of him, and why their prejudices should be awakened against his law and government. The existence and perfections of God, exhibited in his works, lay mankind under the highest obligations to love and obey him. But how are these obligations often regarded ? By an attempt to cast them aside ; for it is the first and most natural impulse of the unsanctified heart to wish that there were no God ; and if his being cannot be denied, to set aside his law and tear away the pillars of his moral government.

Under the influence of prejudices thus awakened, mankind are naturally disposed to believe what is false respecting the Deity. The heart which is supremely devoted to worldly pleasures, is naturally arrayed against the truth. And here we perceive the source of that influence which infidelity exerts. Its opinions are set up in opposition to the truth, and so they gain a ready access to minds prejudiced against the truth. The wishes and fears of the wicked lead them into skepticism. Being wedded to those lusts which God forbids, they are naturally desirous of casting him off, and of living without him in the world. They must either turn from the path of sin, or so shape their religious opinions as to allow the practices which they cherish. As they are supremely devoted to their pleasures, they are compelled by the remonstrances of conscience so to modify their religious sentiments as to quiet its upbraidings, and to adopt such a form of belief as will consist with the pursuit of these pleasures.

Idolatry originally sprung up through the influence of such principles. Idolatry is a system of worship which allows mankind to make their own gods, and to shape the characters of their deities to suit themselves. Hence it is, that there is not an inclination or passion of the human heart which has not been deified. The drunkard and debauchee have their gods; the licentious and revengeful, the robber and murderer, may all discover in idolatry

deities representing their different crimes, whose worship requires the gratification of the corresponding desires which lead to such crimes. So that in idolatry men do but deify themselves, and bend their knee in adoration to their own image.

To a considerable extent, the same is true of infidelity. If, by the adoption of some system of opinion adverse to their moral obligations and to the truth, men can relieve themselves from the apprehensions which the fear of God awakens, and at the same time gratify vicious desires, it is what they eminently desire. If they may only be permitted to make laws for the Deity, and to shape his moral character according to their wishes, it matters not to them what is believed about him in other respects. This, in principle, is but idolatry modified to suit an enlightened people.

In the various codes of morality promulgated, the master-spirits of infidelity have exhibited the great secret of that influence which has controlled their opinions. To allow that scope to the indulgence of their natural propensities which they have desired, they have been compelled to adopt the most absurd principles of faith, and to advocate the morality of the penitentiary and the brothel. We discover the secret of their opposition to the God of the Bible, in their opposition to the morality of the Bible. Hence their endeavors to exalt the religion of nature at the expense of that which is revealed, that they may ascribe to the former any sentiments they

choose, and draw from it the practical inference that man may safely do that to which he is naturally inclined, and that this is all the religion that he needs.

It is from hence that the writings of infidels derive their influence. The opinions expressed accord with the natural prejudices of the heart, and open to the young and ardent the unrestrained indulgence of their passions, as being consistent with the religion of nature. The man who desires to live free from the restraints of the Bible, is naturally disposed to embrace such opinions. Hence the success which attends their propagation. Their superficial reasoning, and bold and groundless assertions, could exert no influence, did they not accord with the natural prejudices of the unconverted heart. And when we reflect how powerful these prejudices are, and to what extent they reach, it is not surprising that thousands should be perverted by them.

That such prejudices naturally exist against the truth, and that to these the arguments of infidels are addressed, is sufficient to account for their success. View the influence of prejudice in the case of the Jews. They had the greatest interest in knowing the truth respecting the divine mission of Jesus; their future happiness depended on this knowledge. Yet an appeal skillfully addressed to their prejudices, bore them on to crucify, with bloody hands, that innocent being; truth in the person of

Jesus was dishonored, and by common consent doomed to die. "His blood be on us and on our children," was the invocation to heaven from angry lips. Under that curse, generation after generation have sunk into the grave blinded by prejudice to the claims of their Redeemer, and lost through their unbelief.

"Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?" was a question wrong in its spirit and deceptive in its influence. Truth does not depend on the numbers who advocate it, or the influence of the names arrayed in its defence; for prejudice misleads the learned as well as the ignorant. Learned men are as liable as others to be swayed in their belief by the influence of sinful affections, while learning enables them to fortify their unbelief with more plausible arguments.

Through an appeal to their prejudices, many, without being sensible of it, have been perverted from the truth. Men make no allowance for the fact that their hearts are naturally biased against Jehovah, and are not guarded, therefore, against the seductive wiles which beset them; and when skeptical sentiments are advanced, they listen to them with a sincere desire, as they think, to receive the truth, and without a suspicion that their hearts are already biased in favor of skepticism. The young man sees brought out to view with an air of confidence, sentiments which foster the appetites of a depraved nature, which remove the barriers of vir-

tue, and open the path of sensuality in all its attractions before him ; and ere he is aware of the danger, he is committed to these sentiments. The prejudices created by a love of sin against the religion of the Bible are of incalculable strength, and the opinions of infidelity are of the kind best adapted to obtain a favorable reception in a heart governed by these prejudices. The youth who trembles at the thought of some sin to which he is tempted, discovers that by the principles of infidelity all ground of fear is removed, and he is therefore influenced by the desire of sinful indulgence to adopt principles which will soothe his conscience, and throw wide open to him the gate of worldly pleasure. Is he without prejudice, and can he make a fair and impartial estimate of the truth ? Is he not naturally inclined to receive the opinions most accordant with the sins he loves, and the practices he wishes to pursue ? And if his departures from God's law are unobserved, if he can act the part of a sensualist and yet maintain his reputation in the world, will he not naturally adopt those opinions most likely to silence the remonstrances of his conscience, and enable him to pursue the path of his own pleasure, untroubled with the thought of a judgment to come ?

Who will deny that the natural tendencies of the heart are to practices which infidelity justifies, or question the power of prejudice thus produced to lead men into the adoption of corrupt and infidel sentiments ? The groundwork of all infidelity is

the prejudice arising in the mind against the duty which God demands ; and the opinions of infidelity are the medium through which conscience is appeased, and the soul seduced from its allegiance to heaven. The depraved affections of the heart are the fountain of all skepticism in religion. The intellect is wrong because the heart is wrong.

How can the man who, in a determined manner, cherishes the sinful propensities of his nature, be right in his principles, when he is so erroneous in his practice ? How can he receive the truth, when his whole life is in opposition to that truth ? Infidelity is the natural result of that aversion to God and his righteous law which the skeptic feels. He scoffs at the Bible because that sacred book condemns his impenitent and wicked life ; and he endeavors, by means of skeptical opinions, to supplant its divine authority, because the admission of its truth would disturb his conscience and awaken his fears while living without God in the world. As he is determined to cast off God and his holy law, so is he ready to adopt any opinion which may aid him in this great work.

This is evident from a review of the moral sentiments promulgated by the master-spirits of infidelity. It must be clear to every reflecting mind that their theory of religion was adopted to justify the criminal life they led.

Lord Herbert taught, that “ men are not hastily or on small grounds to be condemned who are led

to sin by bodily constitution ; that the indulgence of lust and anger is no more to be blamed than the thirst occasioned by the dropsy, or the drowsiness produced by lethargy."

Lord Bolingbroke taught, that "ambition, the lust of power, sensuality, and avarice may be lawfully gratified, if they can be safely to the individual concerned ; that man lives only for this world, that he has no existence hereafter, and that the chief end of his being is to gratify the appetites and inclinations of his flesh ; and that polygamy and adultery are both accordant with the law of nature."

Mr. Hume accords in his moral sentiments with Lord Bolingbroke, and so also does Mr. Gibbon. Both Voltaire and Rousseau advocated and defended on principle the grossest forms of licentiousness ; and Thomas Paine was in practice all that from his writings we should expect to find him, a slave of licentiousness and intemperance.

Nor are the modern schools of infidelity a whit behind those which have been noticed. Robert Dale Owen and Frances Wright have inculcated profaneness and licentiousness in their worst forms, and have recommended a system of promiscuous concubinage as agreeable to the law of nature, and as essential to the perfection of social happiness.

How, we ask, is it possible that persons with such views and feelings respecting the chief good of man, can be other than infidel in their princi-

ples? What is more natural for those whose hearts are fired by such depraved appetites, and who find themselves controlled and opposed by the holy principles of the Bible in the indulgence of them, than to set aside the religion which God teaches, and introduce in its place those skeptical opinions which may tolerate their defection from virtue, and justify the sinful life they lead? How evident is it that infidelity originates in a heart supremely in love with the pleasures of the world, and consequently at enmity with God? We point, therefore, to the depraved heart as the fountain of all infidelity. It may all be traced to that sentiment of the natural heart which makes it prefer to live without God in the world, and to be impatient of the restraints of his holy law. From these reflections it is evident why many wise men have been skeptical in their religious opinions, and why so little weight is to be attached to their example in this respect. The young are often puzzled to know why it is that men who have stood high in the world, and are regarded as of great talents and learning, should have thought so little of the religion of the Bible, and have exhibited an ardent attachment to some skeptical sentiment, and yielded to its ascendancy over them. One reason is, that few such men know anything of the religion of the Bible from an examination of that book, and from an association with those who exemplify its religion in their lives. Their social relations and

habits are such as to throw them out of the reach and influence of sacred truth. They neither mingle with Christians in the walks of life, nor take pains to examine the evidences on which the claims of the Bible to truth and inspiration rest.

But a more satisfactory reason still may be found in the natural inclination of the heart to pursue the pleasures of the world without restraint, and in the tendency of such an inclination to set aside whatever exerts a controlling and restraining influence upon its desires. How could those whose detestable sentiments of morality we have noticed be other than infidel in their belief? How could the gay and fashionable of the courts of Charles II. of England, and Louis XIV. of France, admit any other than the opinions of infidelity? How could Lord Chesterfield, and others of that libertine class, escape the contamination of the same corrupt sentiments?

Infidelity is not so much an error of the intellect as of the heart; and who does not know that men of the most profound scholarship have the same prejudices as other men, and are liable to the same temptations? If the heart have become enlisted in the pursuit of worldly pleasures, what is to prevent the wisest and most learned from adopting a theory of religion under which, while they pursue these pleasures, they may find shelter from self-reproach? It is these who have been led to construct a theory of religion to accommodate their passions, and to defend it by the most seductive

arguments. They have left the more ignorant to reach the same great end, entire freedom from the restraints of the Bible, by the adoption of universalism or some such error better suited to ordinary comprehension, while audacious learning and genius have aimed to reach the very throne of God, and to pluck the sceptre of universal dominion from his hand.

Under the influence of a biased and corrupt heart, men of the highest intellectual culture may err; and the irreligious opinions, formed under such bias, are not the more worthy of confidence on account of the superior intellect of those who hold them. No man would trust a biased judge, or biased arbitrators, however learned, with the disposition of his estate. The question first considered in such cases, is not what are their abilities, but are they interested? And it is a common sentiment of justice, that men who are interested in a case ought not to sit in it as judges. So the man who forms his religious opinions under the controlling influence of a heart wedded to sinful pleasures, is liable to the same errors in judgment, be he learned or ignorant. Learning may enable him to defend his opinions with more plausible arguments, but it will not secure him from the influence of a biased heart; and the example of those learned men who have advocated infidel sentiments, merits little regard. The greatest learning may be associated with the most corrupt heart. A Byron in

poetry may be a slave to voluptuousness. Infidelity springs not from the poetry, but from the passion. It originates not in learning, but in licentiousness. It is not the child of the intellect, but of the heart. Hence it is that learning is not always effectual to restrain men from infidelity ; and hence it is, also, that the consideration, that some men of fine intellectual culture have been infidels, ought not to weigh in the scale of any man's judgment a feather against the religion of the Bible.

If the wise and learned are tempted to the indulgence of their sinful desires, and on this account to wish that there were no God, they possess the germs of infidelity ; and if they become skeptical, their learning will only make them more subtle disputants, stronger infidels, and more dangerous to society, than if they were more ignorant, or were brutish idolaters, or desperate atheists, in their religious sentiments.

Weak and shallow objections against the religion of the Bible often find more favor than unanswerable arguments in defence of that religion. They are addressed to a prejudiced heart ; and the fate of truth, when brought into comparison in such circumstances, cannot long be doubtful. Influenced by affections biased against the truth, men are liable to yield a credence to the most shallow objections. Who that knows the natural enmity of the heart to the duties the performance of which

God demands, would expect to find in man that readiness to be convinced of the truth of religion, that there is to be persuaded of its falsehood? All the arguments of truth cannot persuade a man, who is under the bias of wrong affections, that he is wrong; for it is a true maxim quaintly expressed, that

“A man convinced against his will,
Is of the same opinion still.”

His arguments may be repeatedly refuted, and yet he will cling to his infidelity, because his heart is set upon it. We very well know with what tenacity one clings to that on which his heart is set, and how readily he will listen to the sophism which may seem to persuade him that he is right. The arguments of infidelity are like the flatterers who are around a throne, and as hollow as the breath of their empty adulation; and yet received with favor, while the honest advocates of truth are set aside. The reason is, that the heart loves to have it so. Like the wicked kings of Israel who followed the counsels of the false prophets, and imprisoned the true prophets of the Lord for their fidelity, so the heart loves the lying flattery by which it is encouraged in sin, and discards the plain truth by which its corrupt propensities are opposed and restrained.

Right affections of heart toward God, and a disposition to do his holy will, are the proper correc-

tive of infidelity. When the heart becomes the seat of right affections, all ground for the adoption of infidel sentiments is gone. Men the most determined in their skepticism, who have heaped arguments and objections against the religion of the Bible to the very heavens, have no sooner been converted, and become men of prayer, than they have relinquished their skepticism. Without an argument, or a word from without to convince them of their error, they have voluntarily abandoned it. The reason is, that infidelity is seated in the corrupt desires of the heart; and when the heart is changed, infidelity, like some foul excrescence, when the morbid vessels which feed it are dead, of itself sloughs off. No sooner do men come to love the God of the Bible, than they love the religion of the Bible. No sooner do they find their highest happiness in the God of nature, and engage in his service, than they find in the Bible that very religion which they have experienced.

Hence it is that infidels are always afraid of being converted; and even the most zealous defenders of the religion of nature put the God of nature in their thoughts far from them. Hence they live in the neglect of prayer, and are so willing to join in opposition to all religion of the heart, and especially to revivals of religion. Hence it is that they take no interest in efforts made to turn the voice of blasphemy against God, into one of prayer and praise; and that they are ever found opposed

in their feelings, if not in their conduct, to whatever tends to lead mankind into a just reverence for God and an observance of his holy law.

But let the heart be changed, and how changed the feelings and actions of the man ! All his infidelity vanishes, the society of infidels is forsaken, and those who love the religion and the God of the Bible become his chosen associates and his most valued friends. God, his Gospel, and his sacred cause, are now the objects of his devotion. The fountain of infidelity has been dried up, its streams have ceased to flow ; while love to God and love to man burst forth from the once polluted heart and flow in a ceaseless current, as the river of the water of life from the foot of the eternal throne.

The Gospel brings all its motives to bear on the heart for the purpose of changing it. Without any set attempt at argument, its simple facts are used as the great means of reaching and reforming the world. Truths are exhibited which are fitted to awaken reflection and sympathy, and through these to influence and change the affections. The heart won over to God, carries with it the intellect, takes the whole man, lays him with all his powers and faculties, with all his possessions and interests, on the altar, and offers him up a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God.

He who has given to God his heart, has no longer any cause to maintain against him. All his feelings being brought into a sweet accordance

with the divine will, he has no longer any motive for the adoption of erroneous opinions. The eyes of his understanding being enlightened, he discerns wondrous things in the divine law. The kingdom of grace, into which he has been introduced, is to him a new world. He finds a new God, a new Bible, a new religion, new hopes, new fears, and new enjoyments. Old things have passed away, and all things have become new.

My friend, you are invited to enter into this kingdom of grace. The God of Nature speaks to you through his works, bidding you trust in him; and the God of the Bible says, "My son, give me thine heart." Turn by repentance from all your sins, and "I will receive you and will be a Father to you, and ye shall be my sons and my daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

CHAPTER XI.

THE MORAL TENDENCIES OF INFIDELITY.

IN estimating the value of any system of morals or religion, it is proper to inquire into its tendencies; and these offer a legitimate field of argument either for the support or the rejection of its claims. By tendencies, we mean the influence which the system naturally exerts upon mankind. That every tree is known by its fruit, is a maxim as applicable to religious systems as to individual character. From this test infidelity itself should not be exempt. We purpose to apply to it this test, and so far as is practicable, to unfold the moral tendencies of those skeptical opinions which have been set up in opposition to the religion of the Bible.

Examining them for this purpose, we discover,

I. That INFIDELITY AIMS A FATAL BLOW AT THE EXISTENCE OF MORAL VIRTUE.

Its opinions are inconsistent with that moral goodness in which true virtue consists, and annihilate the sense of its obligations. It must be allowed that man, in the present corrupt and vitiated state of his affections, requires moral restraint. This appears by his inclination to pursue his own gratification at the expense of others. A powerful

and constant influence is needed to control this inclination, both for his own happiness and that of society. It is of great importance to its welfare that the obligations to virtue should be so strong and influential as to bring the mind, with its affections, under suitable control, and to repress most effectually the evil propensities. Every man, on his entrance to the world, comes under an obligation to the exercise of moral virtue. This obligation springs from his moral relations. No sooner does he come into being than he finds himself standing in certain relations to God and his fellow-men. These relations involve duties which he is bound to perform, and which he cannot violate without a sacrifice of the happiness of himself and others. As the child, by birth, comes into such relations to its parents as to demand the observance of filial duty toward them, so man by nature is introduced into such relations toward God and his fellow-men, that he is bound to regard the happiness of others, and to observe the duties arising from these relations.

But the force of all moral obligation consists in the power of its motives. Remove every motive to the exercise of virtue, and you destroy the obligation ; for it is not conceivable that there can be an obligation without a motive. There is no duty required of man which is not invested with suitable motives to prompt to its performance. These motives are inseparable from the obligation itself, and are essential to its existence ; and whatever removes

them, also takes away the force of the obligation. Annihilate the motive to do right, and you destroy the sense of duty.

Does infidelity, then, exhibit any adequate motive to the exercise of moral virtue, and possess any moral restraints which can check the selfish tendencies of our nature, and conduct mankind into the path of duty and happiness? It evidently does not. Its motives are all confined to this present life. Admitting of no certain future existence, infidelity attempts from the varied good and evil of human actions, as seen in the present life, to find inducements of sufficient strength to repress the wayward tendencies of our nature, and to guide men to the choice and pursuit of the chief good. The strongest motives of which infidelity is susceptible are, the respect of the community, and the inward satisfaction felt on doing a good action. These motives appeal to that sense of propriety of which every one is conscious, and to the fear of exposure and shame, and to these feelings only; while they allow that to be no crime which is done in concealment, and that sins the most revolting may be sanctified by the veil of secrecy which the artful are able to draw around them. These sins rise into crimes only as they become exposed to the public gaze, and shock the sensibilities of the community to whose laws they happen to be opposed. What can be more destructive of virtue than the sentiments which infidels profess to draw from the light

of nature, that there is no essential difference between right and wrong ; that virtue and vice depend on the authority of human laws only ; that there is no future state of existence, nor rewards and punishments after death ; that God has no moral attributes ; that he does not concern himself with the affairs of men ; and, indeed, that there is no God ?

Shall it be said that the force of conscience, and the remorse and shame attendant on the commission of crime, are a sufficient restraint ? Remorse and shame derive their influence from conscience, and conscience derives its force from the knowledge and belief of an ever-present and avenging God. But this recognition of the Deity infidelity sweeps away, and with it all the sanctions of moral virtue. Crime contemplates secrecy, courts concealment, and hides itself from the public gaze. Thus concealed, it cannot be reached by the reprobation of the community, nor by human law. It feels not, while undiscovered, any of the restraining influences which are the sole reliance of infidelity. When it shall have been long practiced in secret, worn its channels deep, and acquired audacity by concealment, it may then suddenly be brought to light. But it will then be too late for the successful resistance of such restraining influence as infidelity permits. Habits will have been formed, reputation lost, the restraining power of public sentiment gone, and nothing can then restore the

salutary influence of motives which have proved such an ineffectual security to morals.

The fear awakened by crime springs from a view of the danger incurred, and the shame from the discredit resulting. This fear and shame, upon the principles of infidelity, arise in view of man only, and exert but a feeble influence compared with those emotions which are aroused by the sense of an ever-present Deity. Of what value are all human opinions, compared with His who is the Eternal Sovereign of the Universe; and what is the discredit of having offended a fellow-worm, compared with that which springs from an offence committed against him who is the object of universal adoration and praise? The greatest evil acknowledged by infidelity, as resulting from crime, is merely of a temporary nature, and the highest motive offered is the preservation of life, since life comprises the happiness of the entire being.

But adherence to virtue must sometimes, and will be still oftener supposed to endanger life; in such circumstances, upon infidel principles, virtue must yield; for no man in his senses will be willing to adhere to the rules of virtue, when they bring the happiness of his entire existence into danger. Duty, where life is endangered by its observance, will exert no influence, the force of moral obligation is therefore weakened, and the principles of virtue become impotent upon occasions when their presence and power are most necessary

and ennobling. But restore to the human breast the motives which spring from the consciousness that God is ever present as the observer and punisher of crime, and virtue becomes surrounded again with its proper protection. Give back to God his throne, and to man his immortality—let the power of the world to come, and the fear, shame, and remorse which are imbedded in the human conscience be re-established in man's moral nature, and virtue will again resume its proper sanctions; the criminal will tremble at the recollection of his secret departures from God, and the great motives to virtue arising from the immortality of the human soul and a future state of award, will be reinstated in their office and influence.

II. Infidelity not only provides no restraint for the evil passions of man, but OPENS THE WAY FOR THEIR UNBOUNDED INDULGENCE.

It teaches that death dissolves both the body and the soul, that there will be no revival of consciousness beyond the grave, and no future state of retribution. He who receives infidelity as true will therefore naturally wish to secure in this life all the enjoyment that he can. It will be the governing motive of his actions to accumulate the greatest amount of worldly pleasure. What is right will not so much attract his inquiry as what will afford him the most enjoyment. All proper restraint hav-

ing been removed, the selfish desires of the heart will be encouraged and strengthened. What is there in infidelity to repress them, since exposure is the only danger to be apprehended? If this can be avoided, there is no check to sinful indulgence, and the mind may yield itself up to the pursuit of pleasure, select its own objects, and advance with a bold and confident stride in any career of passion and of sin which is chosen. The fear of God having been removed, the way is opened for the passions of the heart to take their full license. Pride may lawfully prompt its votaries to seek their own exaltation; covetousness urge the accumulation of wealth as the means of worldly distinction; sensuality throw wide open the door to unbounded indulgence of the criminal desires, and envy, malice, and revenge inflame the mind, without apprehension of punishment. Nor does infidelity limit the means of its enjoyments any more than it does the indulgences themselves. In its view, all means are lawful if they lead not to detection. Lying, dishonesty, and perjury, are but the legitimate and innocent endeavors of infidelity to secure for man the greatest amount of good. These, if concealed, bring no injury to one's reputation, and if detected, awaken no contrition; the worst that can be said of them is, that they are only mistakes, erroneous calculations of probabilities, innocent misapprehensions of the future.

In the principles of infidelity, we find no security

for the maintenance of truth and justice, and no sanctions of virtue which are of any force ; nor do we see under what restraint those who are imbued with its corrupt sentiments will feel themselves in respect to any wrong action which may be thought to advance their interests. What is there in these principles to restrain the partisan aiming at political preferment, from secretly working out his plans in contravention of truth, and employing the most detestable agencies to effect his purpose? The question proposed to himself, is not what is right and for his country's good, but how can he best secure his own exaltation, and soonest reach the emoluments of office? If a false oath were necessary to this end, would he shrink from it? By what obligations can you bind the conscience of an infidel? He believes in no future state, no divine providence, no retributive justice. If he falsify his word, or violate his oath, and remain undetected, will he fare the worse for it? Remove the proper sanctions of an oath, and of what force is it? It is but mockery for one to invoke the justice of a God in whose existence he does not believe, or to appeal to that God in attestation of the truth.

So, if by secret fraud one can gain an advantage over another, and transfer his property to himself, do the principles of infidelity restrain him from doing it? He believes in no God who will notice and punish crime, and in no future retribution. All that he has to fear is exposure, and

against this he carefully guards. Or if an infidel be tempted to violate the sanctity of the domestic relations, what is to prevent? This is right according to his code, if his actions are concealed from the public, and he can only avoid the scrutiny of the law.

The only sufficient motives to a virtuous life are the just reverence for God, and the hope of future happiness; but these motives are unknown to infidelity. This tears away all the barriers of virtue, and wears wide the channel for a stream of unbounded licentiousness. It gives full scope to all the corrupt passions of the depraved mind, and teaches man to yield himself up without reserve to those pleasures coveted by the natural heart, and pursued by it as the source of its chief enjoyment.

III. INFIDELITY TENDS TO DEBASE THE MIND, AND TO UNFIT IT FOR TRUE HAPPINESS.

If infidel opinions break down the power of virtue and give license to the selfish and corrupt passions, the influence on individual character of infidelity must be pernicious. It leads men to be lovers of themselves, boastful, proud, injurious and revengeful. It incites them to the commission of crime, to take advantage, secretly, of others' ignorance and necessities, and thus becomes the scourge of human happiness in every department of life.

Removing the sense of the obligations to the exercise of virtue, it gives reign to the wayward passions in the soul, and encourages those habits of thought and of feeling which are at the farthest remove from moral purity. The selfishness of man is adverse to the supremacy of Jehovah, and to that humility which is appropriate to his dependence ; but this selfishness it is the tendency of infidelity to promote. Instead of improving, it debases his moral character, blots out the law written upon the conscience, and so moulds the active powers of the mind as to increase the influence of depravity over it, and reduce the intellectual and noble faculties to the level of a brute. What influence must not the removal of all moral restraint exert on the heart itself disposed to the indulgence of its natural propensities? Or if temporal policy constitute the only restraint, what must inevitably ensue, but the complete reduction of the intellectual being to a creature of impulse, a mere animal whose highest enjoyments consist in worldly gratifications, such as to eat, drink, and be merry, and the pursuit of pleasures most esteemed by irreligious men, without reference to the proper wants of the soul? To live like the brutes in expectation of dying like them, is, according to the principles of infidelity, the end and aim of human existence. If there be no difference in moral actions, no overruling providence in the affairs of life, and no immortality, then how is man better than the brute? He need not ask himself

what is right, but only what is for his pleasure. He need not hesitate as to the lawfulness, but only as to the expediency of any means to accomplish a desirable end. He need not ask whether the course pursued will produce misery to others, but whether it will yield gratification to himself. Thus, instead of cherishing love to his neighbor and regard for his happiness, will he be led to give himself up to the control of principles which will render him as brutal and selfish in his feelings, as he is depraved in his moral principles.

Infidelity unfits the soul for happiness, for this happiness cannot be produced from the reign of selfishness in the heart of man, and from the unrestrained indulgence of its passions. In proportion as the principles of infidelity lead men into sin, they promote their misery. The parent of wretchedness is vice, the offspring of unbelief, which infidelity encourages. Go, search out the cause of those sighs and tears poured forth in the prisoner's cell! Visit the houses of the abandoned and miserable! Trace to the source all the unhappiness under which earth mourns, and you will discover that it has its origin in vice and its attendant sins; and if you further examine, you will find that this vice is encouraged and sustained by infidelity.

IV. INFIDELITY INVOKES A CURSE ON ALL WHO CHERISH ITS POLLUTED SENTIMENTS.

It not only debases the soul, but excludes it from mercy, by its denial and rejection of that blessed

scheme of salvation offered in the Gospel. The principles in which the advocates of infidelity harmonize are not worthy to be dignified with the name of religion; while their discordant and conflicting views present nothing on which the anxious mind of an inquirer after truth can rest. Infidelity strives to tear away the foundations of the Christian's faith, and contemptuously spurns the rock on which he builds his hope, without offering anything instead. It gives over man, therefore, to the consequences of an infatuated and ruinous course. God cannot be pleased with the conduct which infidelity prompts, unless his nature resembles that of the lost angels. What kind of being would he be to approve of those moral acts, and of that character which are the natural growth and expression of infidel doctrines? Can he be holy and just, and yet wish to have the sanctions of moral virtue torn away, and sensuality and pride reign in undisturbed predominance? Can he be pleased to see the world deluged with crime, to hear his name blasphemed and his very being denied? Will the principles and practices of infidelity commend its advocates to his favorable notice? How can this be possible until his own character be assimilated to the very crimes abhorred by his holy nature?

And at last, how does infidelity dispose of its votaries? It leaves them, cut off from the hope of the Gospel, to die. It dismisses them from this mortal life without a belief in a future state, yet fearful lest

the Bible should prove true, anxious to preserve their fortitude to the last, and for that purpose, frigidly dismissing all consideration of their latter end. Thus Hume awaited his death; and to divert the tedium of a protracted illness, engaged with a friend in his favorite game of cards. What a preparation to appear in the presence of his Maker! How unfit these trifling pursuits to prepare him for such a solemn interview! But Hume disbelieved the existence of a future state. After having canvassed, in his way, the subject for the greatest part of life, he had come to the conclusion that there is no future existence, and he seemed to doubt, and practically did deny that there is a God.

What must be the fate of one who, having acted out these principles in life, and treated God, his gracious sovereign, with ingratitude and contempt, comes to appear before him to receive the reward of his deeds? Can we conceive a case which is more hopeless? The wretched man suddenly finds himself at the tribunal of that Judge whose laws he has broken, and with whom he has lived in hostility all his days. Dying in the spirit of him who exclaimed respecting Jesus of Nazareth, "Crush the wretch," he in a moment awakes to see that being upon the throne of judgment, and to discover in him the despised, but Almighty Redeemer of men. Can there be hope, even in Infinite mercy, for such an one, who has died without repentance? There is none. Infidelity destroys the hope of man. It

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deludes the soul till the day of repentance is past, and it then gives it over in his unpardoned guilt to the retributive justice of that God who is the punisher of sin, and who has solemnly declared that the wicked shall not escape the just recompense of their crimes.

Such are the moral tendencies of infidelity. It aims a fatal blow at the existence of moral virtue, offers no restraint to the selfish, sensual, and malignant passions, but encourages and indulges them, brutalizes the mind, unfits it for happiness, and finally provokes the curse of heaven on all who cherish its polluted sentiments. No man can come under its influences, or yield himself up to them, and yet escape the loss of true happiness.

Conceive if you can an object more pitiable than an immortal mind imbued with those corrupt moral sentiments which lead it to fear not God nor regard man, debased itself and debasing others, given up of heaven, and instead of rising to the happiness it might attain, sinking itself in depravity and preparing for misery! While the religion of the Bible elevates the desires to God and ennobles the mind by just and sublime conceptions of his excellency, infidelity drags the soul down from the contemplation of objects which are fitted to promote its lasting happiness to grovel in sensual pleasures, and to meet, at last, the retributive justice of God, for a wasted life and abused mercies. While the religion of the Bible implants in the mind the germs of

true virtue, infidelity sows the seeds of sin, and prepares the soul for a gigantic growth of vice, and to revel in a total abandonment to its lusts. While the religion of the Bible imposes on the actions of men suitable restraint, infidelity casts off such restraint, encourages the unbounded indulgence of the passions, and defends the commission of damning crimes. While the religion of the Bible wakens hope in the believer in view of death, and opens to the departing spirit the bright abode of angels, infidelity tramples that hope in the dust, and closes against the soul that pure and celestial abode. It shrouds the bed of the dying in thickest gloom. It gathers over them a worse than midnight darkness—a darkness which is felt, irradiated by no beam of cheerful hope. O what thickening gloom and crowding terrors hang over the infidel at death! As the world fades from his vision, he sees the objects in which he had placed his happiness receding forever from his grasp. He can enjoy the pleasures imparted by them no more. He can no longer revel in worldly joys. He will hear the merry laugh of his thoughtless companions never again. The objects of his past ambition, his wealth, his pleasures, his worldly expectations and hopes, all vanish. Borne by an invisible power away, he departs, whither he cannot tell. What if the religion of the Bible should prove true? What if that soul, hitherto treated by him with such neglect, should prove to be immortal? What if, after death, there

should be a judgment ! What if, after all, there should prove to be an eternal hell ! When he has turned away from the offered mercy of the Gospel during his whole life, when he has denied the Lord that bought him and openly contemned the blessed Jesus who died to save him, whither will he flee for refuge then ? When the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow his hiding-place, and when his covenant with death shall be annulled, and his agreement with hell shall not stand, where will he find protection ? O my soul, come not thou into his secret, be not partaker of his doom !

What but moral ruin is there in the principles of infidelity ? All its tendencies are to cast down into the pollution of sin the immortal soul of man, and to deliver it bound and manacled over to the dreadful agonies of conscience, and to the quenchless flames of hell. Who, in the hour of death, ever gloried in his infidelity, and professed to draw from its principles that which could sustain and cheer him while passing through the dark valley ? Instead of a peaceful hope, an awful fear has filled the mind of the skeptic, and gloomy forebodings have tormented him. Infidelity could not repress them. But the religion of the Bible never fails the believer at death. It not only arms him with fortitude to endure the struggles of nature, but imparts an ineffable joy. The triumphant expression of the Christian in death is, "O death, where is thy

sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Will you, then, adopt the principles of infidelity, and meet its consequences; or receive the religion of the Bible, and dwell forever in the blissful presence of God? We leave the question for your decision, in the hope that God, of his great mercy, will enlighten you and guide you into his truth.

CHAPTER XII.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFIDELITY ON SOCIAL AND DOMESTIC HAPPINESS.

WHEN the world had been deluged with infidel sentiments which had been extensively and rapidly disseminated, and had found their way into all classes of society, through the writings of skeptical men, it was wisely ordered that the effect of these sentiments on the social and individual happiness of mankind should be tested. Christian writers had warned the world of the ruinous tendency of these sentiments, and that, subverting the principles of morality, they could not but prove destructive of human happiness; but their warnings produced no other result upon skeptical men than ridicule. The enemies of religion grew more audacious as their numbers multiplied and the public ear became accustomed to their blasphemies. A fair experiment seemed desirable, to test before the world the actual utility of the religious opinions of infidels and their adaptedness to promote the real welfare of mankind. This experiment it was necessary should be made on an enlarged scale, as being in its nature more satisfactory and less liable to be disturbed by adverse influences. Infidels had harped on

the miseries of the world under the dominion of laws framed under the influence of the Bible, and it was now important to ascertain what would be the state of society under laws framed without regard to the Bible, and by a people thoroughly imbued with infidel sentiments.

France was the nation selected as the theatre of this great experiment. She had been stained with the blood of her Protestant subjects slain at the instigation of a corrupt priesthood, and that persecuting priesthood and corrupt Christianity were now to be delivered over to the tender mercies of infidelity, and were to receive at its hands their recompense. Amid the corruptions of the Romish Church, many of whose priests were at heart infidels, the people were ignorant, degraded, and superstitious, and the propagation of infidel sentiments became easy. The writings of Voltaire, Mirabeau, Helvetius, D'Alembert, Condorcet, Rousseau, and others of a kindred stamp, were read by all classes of the people, and the poisonous influence of their writings insinuated into the minds of thousands. The true religion of the Bible was comparatively unknown, and there was nothing to oppose the progress of these infidel sentiments but a corrupt Christianity, which had ceased to exert a reclaiming influence on its own professors, and could not be expected in any measure to resist the torrent of infidelity which now flowed over the land. So thoroughly imbued with it had the French people become, as to be prepared

to act with unexampled unity in the grand experiment then to be submitted to the world.

It is important, however, to state wherein the reign in France of infidelity is to be regarded as a fair test of the tendency of its moral sentiments, and of its influence on the social and individual happiness of men. We are far from ascribing to this source results which originated in other causes, nor do we justify that common declamation which confounds all proper distinctions in relation to a scene so vast and complicated as the Revolution of A. D. 1788, which was carried on and controlled by so many different agencies. There are things, however, in that bloody drama properly attributable to infidelity, and results which could have never been reached had it not been for the universal corruption of morals produced by infidelity.

A revolution attended with such horrors could not have occurred in England, where the Bible is read, and the moral influences of the Christian religion pervade the community. In the revolution which hurled Charles the First from the throne and established a new dynasty, respect for the law generally prevailed. But in France, in a later era of civilization, it was far otherwise. Not that all the crimes there committed are to be charged to infidelity. They originated in the selfishness and wickedness of the depraved heart. There the religion of the Bible would have restrained; but infidelity removed this restraint, and opened the way

to public corruption and violence. It removed from the human mind the force of the only influence which could control the human passions, thus deteriorated the public morals, and prepared the way for scenes of blood.

While repudiating the indiscriminate use made of the facts of the French Revolution, in respect to infidelity, we nevertheless claim that many of these facts present a fair and legitimate source of argument as to the influence of infidelity, as a system, on the social happiness of men. Where should we look for its results, but to a people by whom, from the highest to the lowest, its sentiments were cherished? If we would judge from a fair experiment as to what are the real influences of infidelity, we must view the moral state of the people where infidelity reigns, and where it is the religion of the nation. To show the combined influences of religion and education to promote the happiness of men, it is proper to refer to countries where these blessings exist in the greatest perfection; as we illustrate the moral influence of heathenism by a reference to heathen countries; or of slavery by a reference to slaveholding countries; or of popery by a reference to the nations among whom it is generally prevalent. So it is equally proper to refer to a people who have openly and publicly professed infidel sentiments, to illustrate the influence of these sentiments on the social happiness of that people. And in this view it is, that

we look upon the reign of infidelity in France as illustrating the proper influence of those moral sentiments which there prevailed.

That we may gain a clear view of the genius and tendencies of infidelity, we shall adduce several great principles which are the elements of social happiness and fundamental to its existence, and show the bearing on these principles.

1. It must be evident to all reflecting minds, that A JUST REVERENCE FOR GOD LIES AT THE BASIS OF SOCIAL HAPPINESS.

There is not an instance on record of social and domestic happiness having existed in any perfection excepting in nations entertaining a just reverence for God, and a regard for his law. The reason is obvious. It is a just reverence for God which imparts to moral virtue its proper sanctions, and throws a restraining influence over every wrong feeling and action. It is this only which exerts a restraint over whatever in the character or disposition of a man is adverse to the interests and happiness of others. It brings the motives arising from the desire of the approbation of the Supreme Being in a future world, and the dread of his displeasure, to bear even on the secret actions of life, and it therefore conduces to the establishment and maintenance of those principles of virtue, and of right conduct between man and man, which are essential to the well-ordering of society, and to the happiness of man in all the relations of life. Whatever, in

opposition to these influences, tends to remove God from the mind, and to weaken in it this just fear of his displeasure, tends directly to annihilate true morality, and the happiness which flows from the observance of its duties.

But infidelity tends to obliterate from the mind the knowledge of God, and all respect for his character and laws. There is not an infidel author that we know of, who does not grossly pervert the character of the Divine Being, and cast aside his law. Some disconnect his existence from man; some deny his being and attributes; and one remarks, that "the highest and most perfect form of crystalization is that which is vulgarly called God;" while, with one consent, all reject so many precepts of his law as they deem necessary to give them full license to practice their favorite sins.

The extent to which infidelity had undermined the just reverence for God in the minds of the French populace, is evident from the facts which occurred under its influences. "To obliterate," says Mr. Alison, "as far as possible, all former recollections, a new era was established; they changed the divisions of the year, the names of the months and days. The ancient and venerable institution of Sunday was abolished; the period of rest fixed at every tenth day; time was measured by divisions of ten days; and the year was divided into twelve equal months, beginning with the 22d of September. These changes were preparatory to

a general abolition of the Christian religion, and the substitution of the worship of reason in its stead."

"Having massacred the great of the present, and insulted the illustrious of former ages, nothing remained to the revolutionists but to direct their vengeance against heaven itself. Pache, Hebert, and Chaumotte, the leaders of the municipality, publicly expressed their determination to dethrone the King of Heaven, as well as the monarchs of earth." On one occasion many of the bishops and clergy openly abjured the Christian faith, the churches were stripped of their contents by the rabble led on by these apostates from religion, and the sacred vessels were trampled under foot.

"Shortly after a still more indecent exhibition took place before the Assembly. The celebrated prophecy of Father Beauregard was accomplished: 'Beauty with modesty was seen usurping the place of the Holy of Holies!' Hebert, Chaumotte, and their associates appeared at the bar, and declared that God did not exist, and that the worship of reason was to be substituted in his stead. A veiled female, arrayed in blue drapery, was brought into the Assembly; and Chaumotte, taking her by the hand, 'Mortals,' said he, 'cease to tremble before the powerless thunders of a God whom your fears have created. Henceforth acknowledge no divinity but reason. I offer you its noblest, purest image; if you must have idol gods, sacrifice only to such

as this.' When, letting fall the veil, he exclaimed, 'Fall before the august senate of freedom, oh veil of Reason!' At the same time the goddess appeared personified by a celebrated beauty, the wife of Momoro, a printer, known in more than one character to most of the Convention. The goddess, after being embraced by the President, was mounted on a magnificent car, and conducted, amid an immense crowd, to the cathedral of Nôtre Dame, to take the place of the Deity. There she was elevated on the high altar and received the adoration of all present, while the young women, her attendants, whose alluring looks sufficiently indicated their profession, retired into the chapels round the choir, where every species of licentiousness and obscenity was indulged in without any control, with hardly any veil from the public gaze. Thenceforward that ancient edifice was called the Temple of Reason."

"The services of religion were now universally abandoned; the pulpits were deserted through all the revolutionized districts; baptisms ceased; the burial service was no longer heard; the sick received no communion; the dying no consolation. A heavier anathema than that of papal power pressed upon the peopled realm of France;—the anathema of heaven, inflicted by the madness of her own inhabitants. The village bells were silent; Sunday was obliterated. Infancy entered the world without a blessing; age left it without hope. In lieu of the services of the church, the licentious

fêtes of the new worship were performed by the most abandoned females; it appeared as if the Christian truth had been succeeded by the orgies of the Babylonian priests, or the goddess of the Hindoo theocracy. On every tenth day a revolutionary leader ascended the pulpit and preached atheism to the bewildered audience; Marat was universally deified, and even the instrument of death was sanctified by the name of the holy guillotine. On all public cemeteries the inscription was placed, 'Death is an eternal sleep.' The comedian Monort, in the church of St. Roch, carried impiety to its utmost length. 'God, if you exist,' said he, 'avenge your injured name. I bid you defiance; you remain silent; you dare not launch your thunders; who, after this, will believe in your existence?'"

In the cities and villages of the empire, the same scenes were enacted on a smaller scale. In Lyons every vestige of religion was extinguished, and an ass led forward and made to drink out of the communion-cup the consecrated wine, while the Gospel and all the symbols of Christianity were trampled under foot and committed to the flames. All fear and reverence for God was extinguished, and infidelity, in the form of atheism, reigned triumphant. Thus was the first great elementary principle of social happiness obliterated, and France prepared, by her own impiety, for the scenes of misery and blood which ensued.

2. Another elementary principle of social happiness, IS REGARD FOR THE SUPREMACY OF THE LAW.

In all well-ordered societies, the law is the representative and support of all that is conducive to the social peace and happiness of mankind. It represents what they should be, to enjoy that measure of happiness, as social beings, which is adapted to their circumstances. The nearer human law in its moral principles approximates to the divine, the more completely will it represent what is necessary to perfect happiness. Regard for the law is characteristic of every people by whom a high degree of social happiness is enjoyed. But the tendency of infidelity is to destroy this respect for the law. All restraint arising from the fear of God and the divine government having been removed, the next step is to disregard the restraints of human law. In casting off the restraints of the divine law, infidelity makes ample provision for disregarding the laws of man whenever it will suit the convenience or supposed interest of an individual. Mr. Hobbes openly teaches that the natural state of mankind is that of war one with another, and that it is right for one, by guile or fraud, to possess himself of the property or person of another. Many of the deistical writers teach that there is no moral quality in human actions, and no responsibility; thus directly controverting the fundamental principles of morality, on which all law is based. Lord Bolingbroke, and

others of his school, taught, that a secret violation of law is no crime; that if the penalty be only escaped, and one's reputation preserved in society, it is all that is needed; that the soul has no existence after death, and that the highest wisdom of man is to do what will give him most enjoyment, irrespective of the laws of God or man.

What but a total annihilation of regard for law must result from the adoption of such principles? The law loses its power of protection, and social order becomes anarchy under the influence of such licentiousness. Man, for the gratification of his own passions, sets himself at work to do in secret what he cannot do openly without shame, and infidelity encourages him in thus setting the law at defiance, and disregarding its restraints.

When the people of France had cast themselves loose from the restraining fear of God, the bonds of social order snapped asunder. Human law, and the great principles of rectitude applied to the government of men, were all swept away, and anarchy became the result. No man's life was safe under the protection of law, but was held at the mercy of those who happened to be in power. When, for imaginary offences, fifty or sixty persons suffered under the guillotine every day, the Committee of Public Safety urged Fouquier Tinville, the public accuser, to increase them to a hundred and fifty a day; and this individual proposed to place at the bar all the prisoners charged with conspiracy in the

prison of the Luxembourg, one hundred and sixty in number, and to try them at one sitting, and he erected a guillotine in the court-room to execute them the moment sentence was pronounced. The trial of these individuals consisted in nothing more than asking a single question, nor were they suffered to enter on any defence. Indictments were thrown off by hundreds at once, and the name of the individual merely filled in. Not even the forms of justice were regarded; and so great was the dread of falling under the ban of the party ascendant and being proscribed, that men vied with each other in zeal to promote the shedding of blood, for, as has been well remarked, "there was no medium between taking a part in these atrocities and falling a victim to them." The Constitutionals, the Girondists, the Dantonists, and the Anarchists, successively supplanted each other as the ruling party, and the followers of each fell in turn under the guillotine.

Such was the lawlessness of France under the domination of men who had cast off God, and had adopted the moral sentiments of infidelity as their guide. All restraint having been removed, the passions of men had full play, and social happiness became extinct. God was disowned, death was proclaimed an eternal sleep, and human beings ceased to be regarded as having any other claim to justice or life than the noxious reptile which is crushed to prevent its sting.

3. Another element of social happiness destroyed by infidelity, is MORAL PURITY.

Virtue is essential to the happiness both of individuals and society at large. It is not conceivable that anything but misery should exist in the domestic relations, where virtue exercises no control. No man would look for anything like happiness in a society in which there is no regard for morality, and where licentiousness has completely debased the public mind. But it is the effect of infidelity to demoralize mankind. Moral purity, in the view of infidel writers, is a thing unknown. Lord Herbert justifies lewdness as no more abhorrent to virtue, than is thirst in a dropsy. Lord Bolingbroke contends that it is the chief end of life to indulge in the pleasures of sense, and that one may do it without fear, if he only take care not to sacrifice his reputation. Hume asserted that adultery, if generally practiced, would cease to be scandalous, and if practiced secretly and frequently, it would by degrees come to be thought no crime at all. Voltaire and Helvetius maintained the same opinion; the latter advocated the most unlimited gratification of the sensual appetites. Paine was a sensualist of the lowest class. He seduced the wife of his friend, brought her to this country, and lived in abandonment to vice during life. Rousseau lived in the same sensuality, and sent the children of his licentious amours to the foundling hospital. Others have followed, without scruple, the practice they

have advocated, of promiscuous concubinage ; and some have not hesitated to own this to be the perfection of the social system.

But in no civilized community have these sentiments been practically more regarded, than by the people of France. "Marriage," says the historian, "was declared a civil contract, binding only during the pleasure of the contracting parties. Divorce immediately became general." "So indiscriminate did concubinage become, that by a decree of the Convention, bastards were declared entitled to an equal share of the succession with legitimate children. Mademoiselle Arnout, a celebrated comedian, expressed the public sentiment when she called marriage the sacrament of adultery. The divorces in Paris, in the first months of A. D. 1793, were 562, while the marriages were only 1185." "Before the era of the Consulate, one-half of the births in Paris were illegitimate."

From a report of the Prefect of Police, in Paris, it appears that there were, in one year, fourteen thousand eight hundred and twenty-nine legitimate births, and four thousand eight hundred and forty-one, equal to a quarter of the whole legitimate births, illegitimate: there were three thousand eight hundred and twenty-six marriages, and seven hundred and twenty divorces. During the same year, there were twelve hundred and seventy-six lewd women registered, who paid from five to ten guineas each, according to their beauty and

accomplishment, for the protection of the police : there were fifteen hundred and fifty-two kept mistresses who were noted, and three hundred and eight common brothels, licensed by the public authorities in Paris alone.

There died twelve thousand five hundred in their own houses, and eight thousand two hundred and fifty-seven in poor-houses and hospitals : two hundred and one were found dead in the street : six hundred and fifty-seven committed suicide : one hundred and fifty were murdered : one hundred and fifty-five murderers were executed : twelve hundred persons were condemned to the galleys : sixteen hundred and twenty-six were condemned to hard labor in prison ; and sixty-four were branded with red-hot irons : in the number of those executed, were seven fathers, who had poisoned their children ; ten husbands who had murdered their wives ; six wives who had killed their husbands, and fifteen children who had murdered their parents.

Such became the state of society, in a community where moral purity and virtue fell before the corrupting sentiments of infidelity, and such, under similar influences, it always must become. It would be as reasonable to expect that the waters of a river should run back and bury themselves in its mountain springs, as that the depraved passions of human nature should lie buried and inactive in the heart, when all moral restraint has been re-

moved from a community by the licentious influences of infidelity.

4. Another element of social happiness is MUTUAL CONFIDENCE, AND MUTUAL KINDNESS AND GOODWILL.

This springs from the existence of moral probity. Marked honesty in an individual naturally commands the confidence of men, and the importance and necessity of this mutual confidence to social and domestic happiness is apparent.

But what confidence can one repose in his nearest friend, if that friend adopts the moral sentiments of Hobbes, Bolingbroke, or Hume? It is not possible, in the nature of things, that social confidence should prevail to any considerable extent, where the spirit of infidelity prevails. The natural effect of the mutual distrust produced by it was manifested during the reign of infidelity in France. "The farmers trembled to bring their fruits to the market, the shop-keepers to expose them to sale." "Passengers hesitated to address their most intimate friends on meeting; the extent of calamity had rendered men suspicious, even of those they loved the most." "Every family early assembled its members; with trembling looks they gazed round the room, fearful that the very walls might harbor traitors. The sound of a foot, the stroke of a hammer, a voice in the streets, froze all hearts with horror. If a knock was heard at the door, every one in agonized suspense expected his

fate. Unable to endure such protracted misery, numbers committed suicide. Had the reign of Robespierre, says Freron, continued longer, multitudes would have thrown themselves under the guillotine; the fruit of social affections, the love of life, was already extinguished in almost every breast."

The great principle inculcated by the master-spirits of infidelity is self-gratification as the end and aim of our being; the natural consequence of the adoption of this principle is a spirit of hostility to whatever interferes with this end. Instead of teaching men to love their neighbors as themselves, this doctrine encourages the spirit of selfishness. Teaching them to be lovers of themselves, it teaches them, by implication, to hate others, or to be reckless of their happiness.

Language is not sufficient to paint the scenes of cruelty and bloodshed which were seen in infidel France. At Nantes, the prisoners were taken out by fifties and hundreds, into the stream, the plugs drawn out of the boat, while the crew leaped into another boat, and the shrieking victims were precipitated into the waves. Children from eight to ten years of age were thrown into the stream, on the sides of which were armed men, placed to cut them off, if the waves should throw them, undrowned, upon the shore. This exterminating process was carried on against women, and children even, and such was the quantity of corpses

accumulated in the Loire, that the water of that river was infected; and the mariners, when they heaved their anchors, frequently brought up boats charged with corpses. Fifteen thousand persons, of all descriptions, perished there, under the hands of the executioner, or of the diseases in prison, in one month.

In the city of Lyons, two hundred and nine from the prisons were drawn out at once in line, and mowed down by discharges of grape-shot from artillery, stationed so as to enfilade the whole. During the course of five months, upward of six thousand persons suffered death by the hands of the executioner.

At Nantes, "five hundred children of both sexes, the eldest of whom was not over fourteen years of age, were led out to the same spot to be shot. The littleness of their stature caused the bullets at the first discharge to fly over their heads. They broke their bonds, rushed into the ranks of the executioners, clung around their knees, and with supplicating hands and agonized looks sought for mercy. Nothing could soften these assassins; they put them to death even while lying at their feet."

It is admitted by the revolutionary authorities themselves, that eighteen thousand six hundred and three were guillotined by the revolutionary tribunals; three thousand four hundred women died of premature childbirth; three hundred and forty-eight in childbirth from grief: fifteen thou-

sand women and twenty-two thousand children killed in Vendée ; two thousand children shot and drowned at Nantes ; and that the total number who suffered death in the kingdom of France, under this reign of terror, were one million, twenty-two thousand, three hundred and fifty-one.

Such was the social condition of France at this period. Not that infidelity directly originated these excesses ; but when, from causes which had long been in operation, the revolution occurred, and the depraved passions of the heart became excited, infidelity offered no restraint. Among a people imbued with the religion of the Bible, and under the restraints which it imposes, such scenes of lust, cruelty, and ferocity could not have occurred. In the various revolutions in England, and our own country, so deep and pervading were the principles of religion, as to check such licentiousness. The part which infidelity assumed in the bloody drama in France, was to remove all moral restraint from the populace, who were impelled by their own depravity to the indulgence of their passions, till, in a mighty vortex, all that is essential to the happiness of man as a social being went down. A just fear of God, and enlightened views of the immortality of the soul, would have checked the outbursting of these passions, and awakened dread and horror at the commission of crime. But infidelity had swept away these moral restraints. Where, in all skeptical writings, is there to be dis-

covered one motive to virtue sufficiently powerful to control the public mind? Go learn from the expressed moral sentiments taught by it whither infidelity tends. Test its sentiments by the lives of its great masters; learn from the history of infidel France, and the conviction will be strengthened with every fresh inquiry, that the spirit of skepticism is fatal to the existence of social happiness.

The same fatal influences are felt by individuals. Could we investigate the secret principles of the great mass of irreligious men, who have abandoned themselves to sensuality and vice, we should discover that their end is infidelity; and they have adopted its sentiments, not from any convincing arguments, but from the necessity of conforming their principles to their practice. Multitudes have sunk step by step through every gradation of vice, and then, to quiet their consciences, they have adopted the principles of infidelity as their only resource. Their sensuality and vice are not the result of infidelity, so much as their infidelity is the result of vice.

The natural influence of infidelity is to lead men to cast off the fear of God, to neglect the duties of his religion, and to treat him with irreverence. When was a man ever thought worse of by infidels for profane swearing, for a disregard of the holy Sabbath, and for living in secret enmity to God and his laws? When was a man ever cast out of

the society of infidels for the grossest violations of his moral obligations? What immoral sentiment is there too low, or conduct too vile, for one who denies to human actions all moral responsibility, and believes in no future state? Who does not perceive the impotency of infidelity to reform the world? Should the earth be deluged with its sentiments, it would only make its inhabitants the worse: it would change earth itself into a probationary hell. So convinced was even the tyrant Robespierre of this, after he had seen the destruction of social happiness in France, that he uttered the bold and remarkable assertion, that the idea of a Supreme Being who watches over oppressed innocence and punishes triumphant crime, is and ever will be popular. The people, the unfortunate, will ever applaud it; it will never find detractors but among the rich and the guilty. If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent his being.

We entreat you, then, to shun the sentiments of infidelity as you would a pestilence. Beware how you suffer yourselves to be beguiled by their destructive fallacies. Many a young man persuades himself, when he has perused some infidel publication, that the ministers of religion have not received the light that he has, and thinks, in his ignorance, that he has discovered arguments against the religion of the Bible which cannot be overthrown: on this account, we have endeavored to set before you the various opinions of infidel writers,

that you may know what they really are ; and that infidelity, in all its forms, is the bane of social happiness, and the destroyer of the hopes of man. Let the Bible be your guide, and the God of the Bible, who is the Sovereign of the Universe, the chosen Sovereign of your heart. Receive and rest by faith on the Almighty Redeemer of men. Then, amid the sorrows of life, you can never be without a friend ; and when death shall close your eyes, it will not be for an eternal sleep, but your immortal spirit shall be borne on angels' wings to heaven, to dwell forever in that world where the "wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFIDELITY ON THE FUTURE AND
ETERNAL WELFARE OF MEN.

INFIDELITY scoffs at the Christian's faith, and professes to hold in contempt his hope ; and it remains for us to examine the influence which its opinions exert on man as a being of immortality, in contrast with that of the Bible.

1. Infidelity professes, for the most part, to BELIEVE IN NO FUTURE STATE. In its judgment, man is only a superior order of animal, gifted with higher endowments than the brute, and fitted by nature to move in a higher sphere, but destined to the same end.

Lord Bolingbroke and Mr. Hume taught that death dissolves the soul with the body, and consigns both to a common sepulchre ; consequently, that there is nothing to hope or fear beyond the grave. Others, who have not so decidedly advanced their opinion on this subject, have nevertheless treated the existence of the soul after death as involved in such uncertainty, as to entail all the injurious consequences of the former opinion. Mr. Paine expresses a hope of happiness after death, if his existence shall be continued there ; but leaves the whole subject of his future being in gloomy

incertitude. As it is the province of the Gospel to bring life and immortality to light, so a denial of the divine authority of the Gospel sweeps away the evidences on which a rational belief of the immortality of the soul is founded, and throws everything respecting it into confusion and doubt. So that with one consent infidels practically agree in treating the soul as possessed of no immortality, and they extend their hopes and fears respecting its happiness no further than to the boundaries of this present life. Hence, whatever administers the most pleasure to man, considered as a superior order of animal, is, in the opinion of infidelity, his chief good. To eat and drink, to gratify the sensual desires of our nature, to be elevated above want, and free from pain, and to amuse ourselves the best way we can during our continuance here, become the chief objects of life.

Or if circumstances are adverse to such enjoyment, there can be no surer relief from misery, on the principles of infidelity, than for one to terminate his life with his own hand. Or, if others offend us, we have only to put the offending individual out of the way, by a dextrous use of poison or the dagger. The only injury we do in such a case, according to the principles of infidelity, is to deprive our fellow-being of the little enjoyment which remained to him in life, by hastening his departure a little into a state of unconsciousness. Life becomes of inconsiderable value in view of

such sentiments. All the good which man is capable of enjoying, and the evil to which he is subject, are included within the natural boundaries of this present life. The world is the theatre of his ambition ; he lives but for the present, and is conscious that every moment may be his last.

But the religion of the Bible discloses a different aspect of this subject. It teaches that life is but the infancy of our being, and that death introduces the immortal spirit into another state, where it is to exist forever. It presents life to view as the period of preparation for eternity. Instead of living for the present moment, we are to live for eternity ; and the motives to virtue, as the passport to happiness, are drawn from the fact of our never-ending existence. Man is elevated to the true dignity of an immortal being, and before him is opened a world of immeasurable joy as his eternal residence, upon the condition of obedience to God. Life is presented to view as of unspeakable value, as the means of preparation for eternity, and the worth of all objects of earthly pursuit is measured by their influence on the happiness of the immortal soul.

Which of these theories is most accordant with the natural aspirations of man ? It requires but little reflection to determine, and nothing but the recoiling fear of future punishment could have ever led the infidel to cherish so idle a surmise as that death is an eternal sleep. It is so natural to

receive as true what we wish to believe, that the very apprehension of future and eternal misery, as the just consequence of sin, has led some who had nothing to hope, and everything to fear from death, to discard the belief in the soul's immortality.

2. Infidelity, thus regarding as untrue, or at least as uncertain, the future existence of man, MAKES NO PROVISION FOR HAPPINESS BEYOND THE PRESENT LIFE. It treats the whole subject of our future existence with entire neglect. Thus Mr. Paine dismisses with indifference, as unworthy of a thought, the consideration of futurity. "I trouble not myself," he says, "about the manner of my future existence." Having trampled on his Creator's laws during his whole life, he wished to hide from himself the realities of the judgment to come. Instead of inquiring how, as a sinner, he could appear before a righteous judge, and what reasonable expectations of future happiness might be indulged, he abandoned all such inquiries, and was content to plunge into the unfathomable abyss without troubling himself about the manner of his future existence.

Infidelity sometimes admits the possibility of a future existence, but regards it as a subject involved in deep obscurity. In the infidel's view, death is invested with gloom, and all beyond is dark and uncertain. But yet no preparation is encouraged to meet the necessities of the case; death is rather regarded as a careless leap in the dark.

Such conduct is plainly contrary to the soundest dictates of reason. A traveler in the night naturally feels solicitous to know that he is in the right path ; but the infidel, though admitting the existence of a future state to be uncertain, rushes on heedless of danger, and is willing to take a dreadful leap in the dark, without regard to the question whether it will prove fatal to his everlasting happiness, or not.

But the religion of the Bible not only sets before the mind the realities of eternity, but inculcates the exercise of a wise caution in reference to this momentous subject. The preparation enjoined is such as accords with both reason and conscience, including as it does repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. - It imparts to those who love God an assurance that their end shall be peace, and their eternity blessedness. It bears the Christian on to a triumphant conflict with the king of terrors, and to a joyful termination of all his sorrows.

3. INFIDELITY PRESENTS NO GROUND OF RATIONAL HOPE FOR HAPPINESS IN FUTURE ; ITS ONLY ALTERNATIVE AT DEATH IS ANNIHILATION OR MISERY.

Building its hopes on the expectation that the Bible will prove untrue, the most at which it aims is to feel composure in the thought that after a few agonizing struggles death will terminate the existence of the soul. The idea of peaceful serenity and joy, at such an hour, is wholly inconsistent

with the infidel's experience. Grasping at annihilation with a view to elude the punishment of sin, is all that can give composure to the infidel in view of death—all of which infidelity can boast; and but few even of its mightiest champions have been able to maintain such an unwavering faith in their principles as to await in composure even, that fatal pang which should terminate, according to those principles, both their physical and intellectual existence. We well know how sensitive infidelity is on this subject, and how earnestly it strives to hide from the public eye the scenes of the dying bed. While the thoughtless world are busied in their various occupations, could you look in upon the bed of death, you might often see the minister of Christ bending over it, to receive from the lips of the dying a renunciation of past errors, and an honest confession that the once bold unbeliever never fully believed himself the sentiments which he has unblushingly advocated. Such scenes are not uncommon. But infidelity attempts to destroy the effect of them by averring that the dying were frightened into such confessions. But if the principles of infidelity were grounded in truth, and carried with them the weight of reason and conscience, how could hardened scoffers yield so easily to groundless fears? That the infidel is liable at death to the indulgence of such fears, speaks volumes in favor of that religion whose end is peace.

Said one, who openly avowed his irreligious opin-

ions, when asked if he thought he could die by them, "I can; I have no fear of death." On a sick-bed, he thought differently, openly renounced his skepticism, and cried to God for mercy. He did not die, but recovered. When addressed again on the subject of religion, he was found cherishing his old belief. But, said a Christian friend, why do you think that you could now die by your sentiments, since you so heartily renounced them in an hour of trial? He replied, "I am confirmed in them now." Soon an opportunity to test their value again occurred. He was laid on the bed of death, and then his fears returned. He again renounced his skepticism, and died calling on God to have mercy on his soul.

Another individual, once the leading spirit of infidelity in his neighborhood, was taken sick. At first he resolutely maintained his skepticism, and the boast was passed around among his companions that he would die true to his principles. But alas for the hopes of infidelity! When the unhappy man discovered that the hand of death was really on him, he sent for his companions to bear his solemn testimony against their fatal errors, but not one of them would come near him. They fled from his presence as from the convictions of their own troubled consciences, and the wretched man died in the agonies of the assurance that he had embraced a lie, and without any of the consolations of Gospel hope.

It has been claimed for Mr. Hume by his infidel

friend, Dr. Adam Smith, that he died as a philosopher. The account which this gentleman gives of his deportment on the approach of death is, that he continued "to divert himself, as usual, with correcting his own works for a new edition; with reading books of amusement; with the conversation of his friends, and sometimes, in the evening, with a party at his favorite game of whist." His only object was to divert his thoughts from the subject of death; and he assayed to make himself merry at the thought of it. He spoke of Charon, his leaky boat, and the river Styx; and resorted to every means in his power to banish the thought of death to the last. His friends proclaimed his as the death of a philosopher; but said his nurse and housekeeper, "It is true, when his friends were about him, he would try to be cheerful; but when he was alone, the scene was quite different. Such was the agitation of his mind, that he would make the whole bed under him shake. He struggled hard to appear composed; but his disturbed sleep, and still more disturbed wakenings; his involuntary breathings, of remorse and frightful startings, showed that all was not right within. This continued and increased till he became insensible. I hope in God," said she, "that I shall never witness such another scene." We may well imagine that this boasted champion of infidelity determined to repress what he esteemed a weakness, and endeavored, in the view of his friends, to treat death with

marked indifference; and yet that in his secret hours, he had misgivings as to the soundness of his position, and trembled for the consequences.

“Mr. Hobbes died under a cloud of impenetrable gloom. He never dared to think of death, or to speak about it. If his candle went out in his room, he was in perfect misery. ‘I shall be glad,’ said he, ‘to find a hole to creep out of this world.’ As he sunk into the deep valley of death he said, ‘I am about to take a leap in the dark;’ and then closed his eyes without one ray of light or hope.”

It was announced in the public prints, respecting the death of Mr. Gibbon, that “he left this world in gloomy despondency, without those hopes and consolations which cheer the Christian in the prospect of immortality.” He said as he approached his end, “All is now lost, irrecoverably lost.”

“Do you think me dying?” said an infidel of large estate. Being told that he was, he exclaimed, “Impossible! You must not let me die! I dare not die! Oh, doctor, save me, save me! My mind is full of horror! I cannot die!” And then cursing his infidelity, lamenting his fearful end, and speechless, with a dying groan, he bade the world adieu.

Dr. Young gives an account of the death of an infidel, who exclaimed, “Oh time! time! it is fit that thou shouldst strike thy murderer to the heart! A month! Oh, for a single week; I ask not for years, though an age were too little for the much

I have to do. Heaven is lost ! is lost ! It is to me the severest part of hell."

"Doctor," said Voltaire, "I am abandoned by God and man. I will give you half of what I am worth if you will give me six months of life!"

"Sir," said the physician, "you cannot live six weeks." "Then," said he, "I shall die and go to hell." In one moment he would curse God and Christ, and in the next cry out, "Oh Christ ! oh Jesus Christ !" "Fronchin declares that the furies of Orestes could give but a faint idea of those of Voltaire."

Why is it, that of all the facts gathered from the death-bed scenes of infidels, there are none of a pleasing character ? Even in the moments of delirium, their minds seem filled with images and fancies of a horrible kind. Nor is it surprising that such should be the fact, when we reflect that in their sentiments there is nothing to hope and everything to fear from death. The thought of annihilation is itself fitted to inspire gloom ; and whatever shakes this belief, awakens the most fearful forebodings of a judgment to come. So that infidels naturally view with trembling the near approach of death, and have their fears aroused for the consequences.

Thomas Paine, whose opinions we have repeatedly quoted, having escaped by accident the guillotine in France, where he had resided for some time, returned to his native land after the Reign of Terror

had ended, in company with the wife of his friend with whom he had resided in Paris, and took board with William Carver, a blacksmith and farrier, who was one of his most ardent disciples. Here he was visited by Mr. Thorburn, who, in his work entitled "Forty Years' Residence in America," says, "He was the most disgusting human being you could meet in the street. Through the effect of intemperance, his countenance was bloated beyond description; he looked as if God had stamped his face with the mark of Cain. A few of his disciples who stuck to him through good and through bad report, to hide him from the gaze of men, had him conveyed to Greenwich, where they supplied him with brandy till he died."

Mr. M. M. Noah thus describes his appearance as seen by himself: "We once paid Tom Paine a visit, in company with Jacob Frank, editor of the Public Advertiser. He lodged in the second story of a house in Pearl street, above Peck Slip. He soon made his appearance from his bed-chamber. His figure was rather tall, and somewhat thick-set—his hair was disheveled, and filled with feathers and light down—he wore a tattered night-gown tied round his waist—stockings which had once been white, and leather slippers, and, we believe, no breeches or pantaloons, it being a warm summer day. His face was bloated, and his small piercing eyes twinkled over a huge nose covered with carbuncles nearly as large as Bardolph's. His whole

figure and appearance indicated the character of a sot—a person who had been accustomed to good society, but who had fallen from his high estate.”

An altercation between Mr. Paine and Mr. Carver, with whom he had boarded, and who remained firmly wedded to infidelity till he died, led to a correspondence between them, which was published, and in which the statements above given are fully corroborated by Mr. Carver, who charges Paine with “lying,” and with other gross immoralities. He says, “It is a well-known fact that you drank one quart of brandy a day, at my expense, during the different times you have boarded with me.” Mr. Carver narrates other particulars which are too disgusting to relate, and which show how low this champion of infidelity had sunk in consequence of abandoning himself to the practices of vice.

Many have been the regrets of infidels that these facts were ever made public; and especially that they appear so well authenticated as to be incapable of denial. A friend who visited Mr. Paine when near his death, said, “He never saw a man in so much apparent distress. He endeavored to draw him into conversation, but was only answered by horrible looks and dreadful groans, frequently exclaiming, ‘Lord, help!’ Lord, help! Lord Jesus, help!’ The physician who stood by his bedside, being surprised at hearing him call on the Lord Jesus for help, thus addressed him: ‘Mr. Paine, as you have published to the world your sentiments,

I would ask you now, as a man who will be in eternity before an hour, am I to understand you as really calling upon the Lord Jesus for help?' After a moment's reflection, he replied—'I don't wish to believe on that man!' And with this declaration upon his lips, he died."

He was buried on his own farm, and a plain marble slab marking the spot, "was broken into fragments, which were gradually taken away by the curious who visited his tomb, until not a particle remained; and, to complete the singular fate of this man, the sanctity of his grave was still further violated by Cobbett, who, in company with a few other English radicals, went to New Rochelle at night, dug up the body, and stole away the bones, which he carried to England, where he intended to have them manufactured into buttons, to be worn by the radicals in a monster procession which he contemplated getting up in honor of Paine; but neither of these objects was ever accomplished, and the bones being found among the bankrupt effects of Cobbett, were exposed to public sale, and were purchased by some lover of curiosities!"

Such was the fate of this champion of infidelity. Having lived in the open disregard of the great principles of morality, he finished his career as a profligate and abandoned man, sunk in the lowest vice, and abhorred by those by whom he had once been held in honor. How could he have been other than infidel in his sentiments, while he led

such a criminal and wicked life? His infidelity was made necessary by his vices. Had he held any other sentiments, conscience would have been his tormentor, and deprived him of even the small degree of pleasure which the practice of sin afforded him. As it was, his was a horrid death. He lived to demonstrate, by his own example, that "it is an evil thing and bitter to sin against God;" and his life and death present to the world a practical exemplification of the moral tendencies of those sentiments of which he was the zealous advocate. Let his life and death, truly told, go forth to the world, side by side with his religious opinions, and his writings will cease to have influence.

Where, in all the past, do we discover a single instance of cheerful resignation and hope in a dying infidel? On the contrary, the death-bed has exhibited scenes of awful gloom and terror, fitted to appal the strongest mind. When Dr. Burraby told a skeptic, on his death-bed, that he could not help him, and that his case was hopeless and he must die, the unhappy man "raised himself as by infernal power, clenched his fist, gnashed his teeth, exclaiming with the utmost fury, 'God! God! I won't die!' and instantly expired."

So when Sir Francis Newport drew near his end, he was filled with gloomy terror, and "with a groan so dreadful and horrid, as if it had been more than human, he cried out, 'Oh, the insufferable pangs of hell and damnation!' and then expired."

“Tigers and monsters,” said Sir Francis Newport, when the ministers, thinking him dying, had gone to prayer, “are ye also become devils, to torment me and give me a prospect of heaven, to make my hell more intolerable?”

But let us turn from these painful illustrations of the miseries consequent on infidelity, to the death-bed of the Christian. Mr. Halliburton, when dying, said to those around him—“Here is a demonstration of the reality and power of faith and godliness. I, a poor, weak, and timorous man, once as much afraid of death as any one—I who was many years under the terrors of death—come in the mercy of God and by the power of his grace, composedly and with joy, to look death in the face. I have seen it in its paleness, and all the circumstances of horror that attend it. I dare look it in the face in its most ghastly shape, and hope to have, in a little time, the victory over it. Glory, glory to Him! O, what of God do I see? I have never seen anything like it. The beginning and end of religion are wonderfully sweet! I long for his salvation, I bless his name! I have found him! I am taken up in blessing him! I am dying rejoicing in the Lord.”

Dr. Evans, in his last moment, said: “All is well, all is well.” Dr. Watts said, “I bless God, I can lay down with comfort at night, unsolicitous whether I wake in this world, or another.”

Finley exclaimed, in view of death, “Blessed be

God, eternal rest is at hand. O, I shall triumph over every foe. The Lord hath given me the victory. I exult, I triumph! Now I know that it is impossible that faith should not triumph over earth and hell. Lord Jesus, into thy hands I commit my spirit; I do it with confidence; I do it with full assurance—I know that thou wilt keep that which I have committed unto thee.”

Said Dr. Payson, in view of approaching death: “When I read Bunyan’s description of the land of Beulah, where the sun shines, and the birds sing day and night, I used to doubt whether there was such a place; but now my own experience has convinced me of it, and it infinitely transcends all my previous conceptions.” He remarked that one about to leave the world exclaimed, “The battle’s fought! the battle’s fought! The battle’s fought, but the victory is lost forever. But I can say, the battle’s fought, but the victory’s won forever. I am going to bathe in an ocean of purity, benevolence, and happiness, to all eternity.” Writing to his sister, he says, “Were I to adopt the figurative language of Bunyan, I might date this letter from the land of Beulah, of which I have been, for some weeks, the happy inhabitant. The celestial city is full in my view. Its glories beam upon me, its breezes fan me, its odors are wafted to me, its sounds strike upon my ears, and its spirit is breathed into my heart. Nothing separates me from it but the river of Death, which now appears

but an insignificant rill, that may be crossed over at a single step, whenever God shall give permission." When sinking into the arms of death, his last words were, "Peace, peace ! Victory, victory !"

These are but examples of that holy resignation, and of that peace and joy which dwell in the Christian's breast, in the hour of his dissolution. His experience and hope are a striking contrast to the gloom and despondency of the infidel's death-bed. His expectation of future being and happiness rests on a sure foundation. The principles of his religion commend themselves to the reason, conscience, and heart. They are truth, and they offer to the world the sure and only ground of life and immortality. Hence the triumph of believers in death. Hence their willingness to suffer the loss of all things, for Christ, and to die martyrs to his cause. But the infidel knows by his experience nothing of such feelings. A cloud of gloom and terror hangs over his bed in death ; and when he leaves the world, he feels like Mr. Hobbes when he said, dying, "I am about to take a leap in the dark ;" or, like Gibbon, when he said, "All is now lost, finally, irrecoverably lost."

Return, then, you who are disposed to deny God and reject the religion of the Bible, "and discern," we pray you, "between the righteous and the wicked ; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not." Will you have the god of

the infidel world for your portion, or the God of the Bible? Will you receive the doctrines of Bolingbroke, Hume, and Paine, as the guide of your life, or those of Finley, Edwards, and Payson? Discern, we entreat you, the character and influence of these several opinions, and choose the way of wisdom, which is pleasantness, for all her paths are peace.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCERNING THE TRUTH.

AMID the claims of conflicting opinions, and the errors prevalent in the world, the difficulty of discerning the true light becomes oppressive to the mind of the anxious inquirer, and he is led to ask, "What is truth?" This inquiry demands careful investigation. There are fatal errors in the world, and there is truth. The one are ever shifting and variable as the sand; the other is firm, stable, and enduring as a rock. The one may gain an influence for a time, but will fail at last; the other offers a sure support to the eternal hopes of man.

Truth, in its general acceptation, is conformity to fact. This, however, is but saying little more than that truth is truth. When we speak of truth, it is invariably connected in our minds with some standard such as the revealed will of God, and also with the evidences by which it is made to appear to us as truth. The assertion of a philosopher that the earth is round, may be believed on his affirmation alone, but it is not made apparent that this is true unless accompanied with satisfactory evidence.

Truth, however, is distinct from its evidences,

and it exists independently of our knowledge. We are ignorant of many things which are true, and which are known to others more exalted than ourselves. Whether we know them or not, does not affect their reality. It has been true from the creation of the world that the earth moves round the sun, and that the planets are retained in their orbits by the power of gravitation, and yet, till within comparatively a few years, these truths were not discovered and known to man. So, also, there are many things true respecting the person of God and the future existence, which have not yet been discovered to us. Truth is one thing, and the knowledge of it another.

Revealed truth does not depend for its existence on the fact that it is revealed, for it must have existed before a revelation of it could have been made. A revelation conveys to us a knowledge of truth which exists, but of which we are ignorant. The law given on Sinai had existed from the creation of the world, and was the law by which Cain was condemned as a murderer, and the inhabitants before the flood were judged to be exceedingly great sinners. It did not first come into force when God proclaimed it on the mount and wrote it on two tables of stone, but it was then more emphatically revealed than it had hitherto been. This law, which commands the members of the human family to love each other as themselves, and binds the creatures of God in an obligation to love him with all

the heart, arises out of the nature of things as constituted by the Deity ; and we arrive at a knowledge of its rectitude by ascertaining that a holy and just God commands it. This shows that it is obligatory on us. It is not the command which creates the obligation, but our relations ; as the obligation of a child to obey his parents arises not from the parental command, but from the relations constituted between them. That which is commanded by God is evinced by the command to be right ; but the foundation of its rectitude lies back of the command, in the constitution of things as ordained by his wisdom.

Truth is therefore independent of human control. It is not established by human opinions, and cannot be changed by them. No human law can create a single moral virtue, nor make that right which in its own nature is wrong. If the whole world should unite in a declaration that it is right to bear false witness against our neighbor, to dishonor our parents, or to disobey God, it would not cancel the truth, nor take away the binding force of those moral precepts on the observance of which depend the peace and happiness of the community. It would still be wrong to do those things which are contrary to the truth, nor could the criminal nature of those acts be concealed by the gloss which human legislation would throw over their deformity.

Nor is it disrespectful to the character of the

Supreme Jehovah, with profound humility be it spoken, if we affirm, that after laying the foundations of truth in the constitution of things created, he cannot so change the nature of truth as to make that right which he has by the constitution of things made wrong, unless he first break up and change his plan. Should it be said that he has made a new law which commands mankind not to love him, so contrary would this law be to his holy character and the constitution of his wisely-ordained government, that its inconsistency would be at once apparent; and unless our relations to him should be changed, and the constitution of our moral nature, it could never approve itself to our consciences as right. It is not impious in us to believe that God, though infinite in his perfections and supreme, is yet governed in everything he does by an unalterable regard for truth. The foundations of his moral government are laid on the truth; and while these remain, his conduct cannot be morally different from what it now is. His omniscient eye saw through the operation of his government in all coming ages; his wisdom weighed and pronounced it good, and now his justice upholds and his goodness sanctions it. His authority and influence are directed to maintain the present order of things, and it is impossible, therefore, that truth should change. What is truth now will be truth a thousand ages hence. Eternity itself will make no change in the constitution of God's empire, nor

in the truth ; for “ a thousand years are with the Lord as one day, and one day as a thousand years.”

Let it not be thought that this view of truth takes the government of the universe out of God's hands and substitutes a system independent of his control, so that his agency in governing the world may be dispensed with. On the contrary, it exhibits this government as constituted by himself, and sustained by him in accordance with its original design, which was planned in the counsels of eternal wisdom. It does not limit his power that he feels himself bound by a consistent regard for truth to do right, for his is a wise and holy sovereignty, and conformed in all its relations to perfect rectitude ; not arbitrary, fickle, and despotic.

In the application of these principles, we shall discover not only their justness, but utility. The Bible professes to reveal truth affecting in the highest degree the future welfare of man ; let us apply these principles to some of its most prominent truths.

It is taught, in the third chapter of John, that “ except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Other texts, viewed in connection with this, illustrate its meaning, and show that the sinner's heart must be changed, or he cannot go to heaven when he dies. Let us inquire whence this truth derives its origin, and how it acquires its authority ? That it had no existence as a truth till revealed to Nicodemus, and that it

was then constituted a truth by our Saviour's teaching it, is not to be presumed ; for if we examine the facts in the case, we shall perceive that it originated in another way, and became necessary to our happiness through the nature of man and the constitution of the divine government.

One fact which it is important to notice is, that God is holy, and heaven a place of perfect holiness. Where this holy being pre-eminently resides, neither sin nor sinners can find a place, nor can any be happy there but those who love and obey him. This is one fact which we wish you to bear in mind while we proceed to set before you another equally undeniable, which is, that the heart of man is naturally depraved. Unconverted men do not love God, nor love the duties they owe him, but there is a natural aversion to him, his laws, and the spiritual duties which he requires manifested in them all. Whether they are moral in their external deportment, or are open in their sins, the same feelings toward God predominate in their hearts. This is another fact whose truth cannot be reasonably questioned. Observe now the inconsistency there is between the character and feelings which men naturally possess, and those which they must have to be happy with God in heaven. In the nature of things, it is evident that to be happy with him there, either the character of God must be changed, or the heart of man. But God is immutable in his holiness, and cannot

change ; it is the heart of man which must experience a change. This is a truth so obvious and well established, that one would naturally infer it from the facts stated, even if it were not taught in the Bible. Hence the rebuke which our Saviour gave to Nicodemus for not knowing a truth so plain, when he said, “ Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things ? ”

Another truth inculcated in the Bible is, the duty of repentance, as necessary to forgiveness. “ God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.” Whence does this necessity arise ? Is it from the arbitrary command of Jehovah, or from the nature of things as they exist under the divine government ? One principle applicable to this case is, that man is so constituted in his moral nature, that, having injured a benefactor, he cannot enjoy true peace till he has confessed his sin and obtained forgiveness for the injury ; and another is, that real happiness cannot be enjoyed without a peaceful and untroubled conscience. These two principles, which are grounded in the constitution of man, show that without repentance toward God, no sinner can enjoy true happiness. How is it possible for him, without repentance, to be happy in the presence of that holy Being whom he has injured ? It is impossible that he should be. So that repentance, as necessary to our happiness, is a truth which arises out of the nature of

things as they exist under the divine government, and is not constituted a truth merely by the teachings of the sacred Scriptures.

It is another requisition of the Gospel on the sinner to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" for salvation. The violated law demands its penalty, which is eternal exclusion from God and heaven; and unless this law can be sustained, while the sinner is forgiven, it is impossible to save him from this penalty. But Jesus Christ has, by his obedience and death, made such a restitution to the law, that God can, for his sake, freely forgive all who will avail themselves of his mercy and believe in his Son. Faith accepts and rests on Jesus Christ, as the only ground of justification, and it connects the Saviour's work of expiation with the sinner's guilt, to take that guilt away. Forgiveness is thus freely extended to him on repentance, and peace and happiness restored. Faith thus recovers him back to the enjoyment of the divine favor, and, together with repentance, becomes necessary to his happiness, not because God has commanded it, but because it is demanded by the nature of things as they are constituted by the nature of man, and the glorious scheme of redemption, as a remedy for his ruin.

That the wicked receive punishment after death, is another clear inculcation of the Gospel. Is this a state of misery prepared by God with a design to

torment his creatures, or does it arise out of the nature of man and his relations as a sinner to the divine government?

In his holy law, God commands men to do what is right, and to avoid what is wrong. This law is designed to guard and support his throne. It is infinitely desirable that men, out of regard to their own happiness, should be prevented from committing sin. The interests and happiness of all holy beings depend on the maintenance of holiness; and God has aimed to guard and protect these interests, by promulgating his law, with its proper sanctions. A law necessarily contains a penalty, otherwise it is only advice. What ought, then, to be the penalty of that law which is charged with the support of all virtue, and is designed to promote happiness by the prevention of sin? It should evidently bear a suitable proportion to the ruin which sin involves, and to the criminality of sinning against God. When we attempt to estimate this crime, human reason staggers and is confounded. We see the penalty of death incurred for a crime which may be committed in a moment, and that the length of time it takes to commit a crime is no just measure of its guilt. We see, moreover, that the sinner's criminality must bear a suitable proportion to the dignity of that Being whose law is broken, his right to command, the strength of the obligation violated, and the injury done by disobedience. But these are all infinite in their na-

ture ; and the injury done by disobedience is, therefore, infinite. But a punishment of less duration than one that is eternal cannot be infinite, for it can be measured and will have an end. Less than a punishment of infinite duration, therefore, could not sufficiently manifest Jehovah's infinite abhorrence of sin. If there be not an infinite penalty, then it is not infinitely wicked to sin against God. It is perfectly accordant with the nature of the divine government, therefore, for the sacred Scriptures to teach an endless punishment of the wicked after death ; and it is also accordant with the moral constitution of man, for in this is there provision made for the proper punishment of sin. There is implanted in the human breast a conscience, and shame, remorse, and despair are the natural fruits of this principle as operative in the guilty mind. Most fearful are the terrors which it occasions. Placed in the human breast to deter from sin, it also becomes its punisher ; and it is compared in its operations to the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched. Thus the truth that sin will receive its proper punishment is founded in the nature of the divine government and the constitution of man.

Another truth inculcated in the Bible is, that the righteous and wicked will be separated after death. Possessed of different moral characters, they will not be permitted to mingle together, but will be severed and assigned to different places of abode—

the one to heaven, and the other to hell. This truth perfectly accords with the facts as developed in experience. There is a separation, in moral feeling and enjoyment, between these several classes of mankind. There is no unison of feeling between the man of prayer and the blaspheming infidel, nor could they be happy in each other's society. The Christian cannot enjoy the company of those who curse the God he supremely loves, nor the scoffer the society of those who praise and adore the great Creator. This diversity of moral feeling pervades all classes of society, and separates the righteous and the wicked with as much certainty as the finger of God will do it in the judgment day. It is not the object of that day to make a separation between these two classes, but only to declare the separation which already exists. This separation, therefore, arises out of the nature of things as they exist under the divine government, and it is revealed because it is true, not merely true because revealed.

If successful in making this distinction intelligible, I have illustrated the difference between truth and its evidence, and shown what relation it has to the divine command, and to the sacred oracles in which it is revealed. If permitted further to investigate this subject, it might be shown how one truth harmonizes with another in the great system of revelation, and how every doctrine occupies a

place in this system in perfect harmony with each other.

It follows from these principles, that truth is immutable in its nature. Arising out of the constitution of things as ordained by God, it is incapable of change. Nature must itself be changed before the principles which it sustains can be overthrown. But the same wisdom which ordained it, foresaw the operations of this system, in every case, from the beginning, as clearly as they are seen now. On the part of God, therefore, there is no occasion for change. Besides, his veracity is pledged to sustain the system already established, and change there can be none. What is truth now, will be truth a thousand ages hence. What God has promised to confer on those who love him, he will live to fulfill when time shall be no more; and his threatenings he will live to execute, when the earth and heavens shall have passed away. Far above the waves of time, on the rock of eternal truth, Jehovah has built his throne; and there he reigns unshaken in his authority, wise, holy, just, and good, the glorious and eternal God. It cannot now be true, that there shall in no wise enter into his heavenly kingdom anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination and maketh a lie, but they only whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and yet that those who are not the followers of the Lamb, and whose names

are not written there, shall finally be saved. It cannot now be true, that "he that believeth not on the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him," and yet that the impenitent and unbelieving will be safe and happy when they die. Either the record of truth, God's revealed word, is false, and must be rejected as unworthy of our belief; or their hopes are false who change this truth into a lie. But this record cannot be set aside, for the truths it reveals are accordant both with the constitution of man and the nature of the divine government, and they are immutable. No human device can overthrow or change them. They will be true forever.

The Bible, so often condemned as fabulous and worthless, is but the record of truth, not the truth itself. Truth exists independently of its record. If no revelation of it had been made to us, it would have been the same that it now is, and we should have been ignorant of much that is essential to our happiness. The Gospel does not create life and immortality, but only brings it to light. It spreads out before us eternity with its joys and woes, and teaches us how to gain the one and shun the other. It is good tidings, proclaiming to the world, as it does, the way of mercy and of peace. This revelation God has made for our benefit. It was a gratuity on his part, conferred out of regard to our happiness. He would not leave us ignorant of

himself, and of that which our happiness requires, and he cheerfully communicated to us the Gospel.

This evinces the folly of those who would deprive the sacred Scriptures of their authority as the guide of life. They aim to blot out the truth, when they only trample the book in the dust. The truth still lives, and condemns them for this very act. They reject the Bible because it teaches that they are sinners, and cannot be saved without repentance, not from a solemn and prayerful conviction of the truth. Through a careful study of the Bible, many have become Christians, but not one has in this way become an infidel. Men cast aside the Bible, not because it is not true, but because it condemns the sins and follies of their life, and they are not willing to change that life, and give up their sins for heaven.

But to trample on the Bible will not destroy the truth it reveals. The book they may abuse; but the truth, like the sceptre of God, is above their power. Though they should gain the voice of every human being on their side, they cannot annihilate nor change it. They may hide their own eyes from the sun, but that glorious luminary they cannot touch; it will still shine resplendent, and continue to guide aright those who love its beams. When the National Directory of France proclaimed that there is no God, did it hurl the Deity from his throne; and was he terrified with the fear of anni-

hilation? When they obliterated his Sabbath and attempted to change his laws, did it affect, in the least, the duty of the creature? It were easier far to blot out the sun from the firmament than to obliterate the truth.

“Truth struck to earth, shall rise again,
The eternal years of God are hers;
But error wounded, writhes in pain,
And dies amid her worshippers.”

Never has the truthfulness of this remark been more apparent than in the efforts of skeptical men to overthrow the authority of the Bible. They have spurned with infinite contempt this sacred volume, and yet its truth, like the glorious sun in the heavens, still shines, while their attempts have but recoiled upon themselves, to their own eternal shame.

Men who are trusting in the delusions of error, forget that they must one day know the truth. Men in business sometimes endeavor to hide from themselves the fact that they are bankrupt. They hope it is not so, and that, by means of some fortunate speculation, they shall yet be enabled to retrieve their affairs. They borrow, to meet an exigency before them; and having attained a present aid, their hearts are comparatively light. But time rolls on, and the day of payment comes. Their accumulated burden becomes too heavy to be borne, and their fond hopes are all prostrated at a blow. So is it with those who attempt to hide from

themselves their obligations to God, and suffer his claims to be set aside by the seductive allurements of the world. They endeavor to evade the truth, flee from it, shun it, but it is all of no avail. The day of reckoning comes, death introduces them to the judgment, and all their hopes perish.

There is but one safe course for man to pursue, and that is honestly to receive and obey the truth. Those who love God, love his truth. They fear it not, but receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save their souls. There is nothing gained by a refusal to view things as they really are. Why should the truth be repulsive to one, unless he is conscious that he does not conform his life to its demands? The sting of death is sin, but they who have no sin, are in no danger; they need not be offended with the sacred Scriptures, and attempt to destroy their authority, for the truth cannot harm them. But if conscious of being sinners against God, then to be offended with the truth, to tread the Bible in the dust, and to listen to the blasphemous suggestions of the infidel and scoffer, is the most consummate folly. It will not prevent them from coming to the knowledge of the truth, and from standing at last before the judgment-seat of Christ. All their attempts to ridicule religion will not save them from the dread summons of death, or prevent them from appearing in judgment before an offended God to receive their fearful award.

You may accord with the infidel in his disbelief of the truth, and treat the Bible as unworthy of your confidence. But what has infidelity to boast of which is superior to Christianity? Will it make men better members of society, and better men—more exemplary, honest, benevolent, and kind? Will it render them more moral, more disposed to love and obey God, and fit them better in their moral feelings to be happy with him in a holy heaven? Will it take away from death its sting, and give them the assurance of boundless happiness beyond the grave? No. Infidelity has no power to do this. It is merely negative in its character, and consists in a denial that man needs such an assurance of future bliss, and that he has any existence hereafter. But the Christian religion has power in these respects, not only to make men good, lovers of God, and happy in their relationship to him here, but to give them the assurance of future and heavenly bliss, when the earth, and its scenes of pleasure and of woe, shall have passed away. If infidelity should prove true, the Christian will be as safe in his religion and as happy as the infidel. But if the Christian religion should prove true, what must become of the infidel? What hope can he have of happiness beyond the grave?

Do not, then, risk your immortal interests by confiding in any of the delusions of error. O, receive the truth as it is set forth to you in the Gospel. “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” said Jesus

Christ, "and no man cometh unto the Father but by me." "Believe on him with all thine heart, and thou shalt be saved."

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